

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

TALMUDIC METHODOLOGY
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**Shiur #08: The Seven Day Isolation Period for the *Kohen Gadol*
Prior to Yom Kippur**

The opening *mishna* in *Yoma* describes how the *Kohen Gadol* was isolated for seven days prior to Yom Kippur in a designated gallery located in the vicinity of the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*.

The *gemara* cites a *machloket* between R. Yochanan and Reish Lakish as to the source of this practice. R. Yochanan derives this isolation from the seven day isolation period known as *Milu'im* prior to the inauguration of the *Mishkan* (as described in the end of *Parashat Tzav*). Just as the *Kohanim* spent seven days posted in the *Mishkan*, the *Kohen Gadol* should similarly be “posted” in the *Mikdash* seven days before Yom Kippur. Reish Lakish cites a different source – Moshe's seven-day period atop Har Sinai prior to receiving the Torah. Moshe was actually isolated for only six days, but the *Kohen Gadol* must add a day to account for possible *nida-tuma* complications.

It appears obvious that the SOURCE of this sequestering impacts its NATURE and FUNCTION. Moshe isolated himself in preparation for encountering the *Shekhina* at Har Sinai. Reish Lakish views the period pre Yom Kippur as facilitating a similar encounter when the *Kohen Gadol* enters the *Kodesh Ha-Kodoshim* on Yom Kippur. In fact, the Ran (*Derashot Ha-Ran*, 4th *derasha*) makes this association. The seven day period modeled after the preparation for Har Sinai is necessary to prepare for encountering the *Shekhina* on Yom Kippur.

In contrast, R. Yochanan compared the pre-Yom Kippur sequestering to the *Milu'im* period and evidently viewed it as a preparation necessary for AVODA ceremonies in the *Mikdash*. Just as the first historical *avoda* in the *Mishkan* required orientation through preparation and isolation, similarly the Yom Kippur service (which effectively refreshes the *Mishkan* by cleansing it of its accumulated impurity) requires an isolation period.

The debate about the source would also see to influence the SCOPE of this rule. A parallel *mishna* in *Para* speaks of a similar seven day period for the *Kohen* who processes the *para aduma*. According to R. Yochanan, it is POSSIBLE that this practice of isolation prior to *para aduma* stems from the same source as the pre-Yom Kippur isolation practice. Just as preparation for the special Yom Kippur *avoda* requires seven days of isolation, the unique *avoda* surrounding the *para aduma* similarly requires seven days of isolation. In fact, R. Yochanan derives each of these similar practices from the *pasuk* about the *Milu'im*. Though ultimately, the *gemara* (3b) concludes that this statement is a reflection not of R. Yochanan's personal opinion, but of his teacher. R. Yochanan's source certainly ALLOWS twinning the *para aduma* isolation with the Yom Kippur isolation and allows deriving them from the same *pasuk*. In contrast, Reish Lakish's source – Har Sinai – has little relevance to *para aduma*, which is processed OUTSIDE the precincts of the *Mikdash* – and it is unrelated to the encounter with the *Shekhina*. Evidently, Reish Lakish would subscribe to the opinion that the pre-*Para Aduma* isolation IS NOT *de-oraita* but only Rabbinic. In fact, the *gemara* in *Yoma* (3b) cites several opinions which claimed that the isolation period prior to *para aduma* is only a *ma'ala* (a safeguard) – typically suggestive of a Rabbinic-based halakha.

Alternatively, Reish Lakish's model may apply to ANY encounter with the *Shekhina*, even if not rooted in any *avoda* ceremony. A very famous position of the Vilna Gaon suggests that the *Kohen Gadol* could enter the inner sanctum as often as he wished, even if it were not Yom Kippur. R. Menachem Zamba (in his *Chiddushim, siman 13*) asserted that if the isolation period stems from the encounter with the *Shekhina*, it would be required even in non-Yom Kippur visits. Obviously, R. Yochanan's model would be irrelevant to a random entry that does not incorporate any *avoda*.

It appears that the *gemara* recognized this difference between R. Yochanan and Reish Lakish. Immediately upon listing R. Yochanan's opinion, the *gemara* questions his application SPECIFICALLY to Yom Kippur. Perhaps other special days in the *Mikdash* which require special *avoda* ceremonies ALSO require a prior seven day separation period. The *gemara* succeeds in deflecting all these questions and concludes that ONLY Yom Kippur requires this preparation. Fundamentally, however, the *gemara* assumes that R. Yochanan should not discriminate between Yom Kippur and any other special day with its special *avoda*. Interestingly, this line of questioning is not posed to Reish Lakish. By citing the Sinai experience as the model for separation, Reish Lakish was obviously tethering the practice to an eventual encounter with the *Shekhina*. This encounter occurs only on Yom Kippur and NOT on other special festival days. Hence, it is illogical to suggest applying this practice to those days.

This question as to whether the period prepares for unique *avoda* or for encounter with the *Shekhina* may influence the question of WHERE the *Kohen Gadol* resided during this period. The *mishna* assigns the Parhedrin gallery, which was located on the northern flank of the *Mikdash* as his seven day retreat. Was this gallery considered part of the actual halakhic *Mikdash*? Is it necessary for the *Kohen Gadol* to reside in the actual *Mikdash*? Tosafot (2a) cite two different opinions, but from the Rambam's comments (*Avodat Yom Ha-Kippurim* 1:3) it is apparent that this gallery was incorporated within the *Mikdash*.

A different comment of Tosafot (8a) also appears to cite two opinions about the location of the Parhedrin gallery. In their second approach, which is clearly committed to the fact that this gallery was located within the confines of the *Mikdash*, Tosafot deals with an apparent contradiction. Typically, EVEN SITTING is not allowed in the *Mikdash* precincts. How, then, can the *Kohen Gadol* SLEEP there? Tosafot maneuver their way out of this jam by suggesting that the gallery's doors opened outward, emptying them from halakhic *kedusha* and enabling sitting and even sleeping in them. However, as they WERE built in *Mikdash* SPACE, they are still considered PART of *Mikdash*. In their second approach, Tosafot are so committed to positioning the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Mikdash* that they must creatively solve the problem of the halakhic prohibition.

Clearly, R. Yochanan's version of the sequestering would mandate presence IN THE *MIKDASH*. Since the period helps prepare for the *avoda* which occurs in the *Mikdash*, the *Kohen* should be stationed there. After all, the template for this period is the *Milu'im* week, during which the *Kohen* was posted in the *Mikdash*. Reish Lakish's model of preparing to encounter the *Shekhina* would not require the *Kohen Gadol's* presence in the *Mikdash*, much like Moshe did not prepare for his encounter with the *Shekhina* by residing in *Mikdash* precincts .

An additional question surrounds the schedule during this week. Must the *Kohen Gadol* remain full time in the gallery, or may he take brief home visits? The *Tosafot Yeshanim* (*Yoma* 6a, s.v. *mi-beito*) claims that he CAN leave for short periods, while a contrasting *Tosafot Yeshanim* (*Yoma* 10b) claims that he must remain fully sequestered. Again, if the model for this period is the *Milu'im*, he may be required to remain full time, as the earliest *kohanim* did. However, if the model is Moshe's seven day period atop Har Sinai, perhaps his preparation would not be disturbed by short visits home.

R. Soloveitchik suggested an interesting question regarding the *Kohen Gadol's* practicing the *avoda* during this week. The *gemara* (4a) claims that

during this entire week, two experts instructed the *Kohen Gadol*. This parallels how Moshe instructed Aharon during the *Milu'im* ceremony. Is this instruction ABSOLUTELY necessary? If the *Kohen Gadol* were himself an expert, would he still require instruction? Again, according to R. Yochanan's model, perhaps this instruction is integral. Just as the seven day *Milu'im* period enabled instruction, this seven day period should similarly facilitate the process. However, Reish Lakish's model of separation would not require instruction unless it were technically necessary to train an inexperienced *Kohen Gadol*.