

Bechoros – Simanim

פרק א – הלוקח עובר חמור

Daf 5 – דף ה

1. The Roman officer's questions about the "missing" Leviim and שקלים

Kuntrukos the Roman officer asked Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai that בפרטן – *in the detailed* count of the Leviim, you find a total of 22,300 Leviim, but בכללן – *in their total* count, only twenty-two thousand are listed!? Where did those three hundred go? Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai replied that those three hundred were themselves בכורות. These could not remove the *kedushah* of a *bechor* of Yisroel, because דיור שיפיקיע קדושת עצמו – *it is sufficient for a firstborn Levi to remove his own kedushah*. The שר asked another question: in the collection of silver for the משכן, there should have been two hundred and one *kikars* and eleven *maneh*. Each of the 603,550 men contributed a half-*shekel*, totaling 301,775 *shekalim* (א כבר equals 1,500 *shekalim*, and a *maneh* is 25 *shekalim*). Yet, the silver given for the משכן is only listed as one hundred *kikars*. היה או קוביוסטוס היה – *Moshe your teacher must have been a thief, or a kidnapper, or he was not an expert in accounting!* Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai replied that Moshe was a גיזר נאמן – *a reliable treasurer*, and an expert in accounting, but the *maneh* of *hekdes* was double the size of a common *maneh*, as the Gemara proves.

2. Why are donkeys specifically sanctified as a *bechor*?

Rebbe Chanina asked Rebbe Elazar: מה נשתנו פטרי חמורים מפטרי סוסים וגמלים – *why are firstborn donkeys different from firstborn horses and camels*, that firstborn donkeys are sanctified as *bechoros*? He replied: גזירת הכתוב היא – *it is a decree of the Torah*. Furthermore, שסייעו ישראל בשעת יציאתם ממצרים – *[donkeys] aided Yisroel when they were leaving Mitzrayim*, שאין לך כל אחד ואחד מישראל – *there was not a single one of the Jewish people* – *who did not have with him ninety Libyan donkeys laden with the silver and gold of Mitzrayim*. Rebbe Chanina also asked Rebbe Elazar about the names of the cities "רפידים" and "שטים", and Rebbe Elazar replied that they were simply their names. However, Tannaim disagree regarding these questions. Rebbe Yehoshua explains that "רפידים" hints מדברי תורה – *that they weakened themselves in Torah* (resulting in עמלק attacking them), and "שטים" hints בדברי שטות – *that they involved themselves in foolishness* (through immorality with the women of מואב).

3. Different sources exempting a *bechor* which resembles a different animal

The next Mishnah states that if a cow's firstborn resembles a donkey, or a donkey's firstborn resembles a horse, it is exempt from *bechor* status, because the *passuk* says "פטר חמור" twice, teaching: חמור והנולד חמור – *bechor status does not apply unless the [mother] is a donkey and the offspring is a donkey*. However, another Mishnah teaches that if a רחל – *ewe* had a firstborn resembling a goat, or a goat's firstborn resembles a ewe, it is exempt from *bechor* status, and Rebbe Yose HaGlili gives a different source: "אך בכור שור" – *but the firstborn of a cow*, teaching: עד שיהא הוא שור ובכורו שור – *bechor does not apply unless [the mother] is a cow and its firstborn is a cow*. He similarly *darshens* the phrases about sheep and goats. [Still, the word "אך" – *but* teaches that if the offspring has מקצת סימנין – *partial features* of the mother, it is considered a *bechor*.] The Gemara explains that our Tanna holds that the Torah taught this exemption regarding קדושת דמים – *monetary sanctity* (i.e., a פטר חמור), and it applies equally to קדושת הגוף – *physical sanctity* (i.e., a *bechor* of a kosher animal). Rebbe Yose HaGlili holds the reverse.

Siman – Hay

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3 things to remember

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2. Why are donkeys specifically sanctified as a *bechor*?
3. Different sources exempting a *bechor* which resembles a different animal

