

The Weekly Daf



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Week of 11-17 Sivan 5757 / 16-22 June 1997

Me'ilah 5-11

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Two Views of the Holy Ashes

Take a look in your *siddur* (prayer book) and you will see in the very early part of the *shacharis* morning service a chapter from the Torah (*Vayikra* 6:1) which describes the first service performed by the *kohanim* each day in the *Beis Hamikdash*. After washing his hands and feet in the special basin in the Temple courtyard, a *kohen* would take a silver shovel, go up to the altar where the coals and ashes from the consumed sacrifices were gathered, and scoop up some of the most consumed ashes which he would then place on the floor next to the altar ramp.

This ritualistic "lifting of the ashes" was followed by an assault upon the large pile of remaining ashes by his fellow *kohanim*. They raked and shoveled these ashes into the center of the altar where they formed a dome similar to the shape of an apple. When this "apple" grew to such a size that it interfered with the activities of the *kohanim* it would be removed by the *kohanim*.

What is the status of these ashes in the "apple"? If someone takes some of them for private use is he guilty of *me'ilah* because he has misappropriated sacred property, or do we view these ashes as something whose mitzvah has already been completed and therefore no longer subject to the ban of *me'ilah*?

If he takes these ashes from the "apple" before the ritualistic lifting of the ashes the ban of *me'ilah* certainly applies because that mitzvah has still not been performed. But if this ritual has been completed and all that is left to do with the remaining ashes is to remove them to somewhere "outside the camp" there are two ways of viewing these ashes. The Sage Rav views this subsequent removal of the ashes not as a religious service but simply as a practical elimination of an impediment. Since all *mitzvos* have already been done with these ashes they no longer have a sacred status subject to the laws of *me'ilah*. Rabbi Yochanan takes an opposing view. Since the *kohanim* who remove these ashes must wear the special garments of a *kohen*, albeit less expensive ones than for other services because of the less esthetic nature of this action, we look at these ashes as still maintaining a sacred status because there is still a mitzvah to be done with them. *Me'ilah*, therefore, still applies.

Me'ilah 9a

Mystery of the Holy Wine

Wine which was poured as a *nesachim* libation on the altar as an accompaniment to a sacrifice is considered sacred and subject to the laws of *me'ilah* until it enters the ducts on the altar; from then on *me'ilah* no longer applies.

This rule stated in our Mishnah recalls a dispute in *Mesechta Sukkah* (49a) about the nature of these ducts into which the wine libations were poured. Several sages contend that these ducts went from the altar all the way to the watery depths of the universe. Rabbi Elazar bar Tzadok's opinion is that they ended at the internal base of the altar and once every 70 years some young *kohanim* would climb down a narrow passageway between the altar and the ramp leading to it and retrieve the wine which had congealed like pressed figs. They would then burn this congealed wine in the Sanctuary because it still had a sacred status.

Both of these views present a problem in regard to understanding our Mishnah. The first view presents a practical challenge — if the wine went all the way down to the depths, what need is there to mention that they are not subject to *me'ilah* after entering the ducts? While this is not a problem for Rabbi Elazar's approach, since the wine was retrievable, there is a different challenge — why is this wine not subject to *me'ilah* if it is considered sacred enough to require burning within a sacred area?

The resolution which is offered for both of these problems, both here in our Gemara and also in *Mesechta Sukkah*, is that our Mishnah deals with a case where the *kohen* placed his hand in the duct and caught the wine before it went all the way down. In such an event there is no longer a problem for the first approach as to how the wine is still around for discussion as to whether *me'ilah* applies. Rabbi Elazar's explanation is that once the wine has entered the ducts its mitzvah has been complete so that *me'ilah* no longer applies. Should the wine reach the base of the altar, however, it is once again sanctified by the contact with the Temple floor and requires burning in a sacred place. Since it was caught before that it has no sanctity and is exempt from the laws of *me'ilah*.

Me'ilah 11b

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