

The Weekly Daf



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Bechoros 18-24

Week of 19-25 Shevat 5757 / 27 January - 2 February 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

How Exact is Exact?

Is it possible to be perfectly exact in timing and measuring?

This issue arises in our Gemara in regard to two cases which represent two categories of exactness.

The first is an exactness of timing where human effort is not involved. A sheep gives birth to twin males in its maiden birth and their heads come forth from the womb simultaneously. Do we assume the possibility that both were born at exactly the same moment and award both lambs to the *kohen*, or do we say that there is no such thing as perfectly equal timing, and therefore only one goes to the *kohen*?

Rabbi Yossi Haglili rules that we can assume that both were born at the exact same moment and, therefore, both lambs go to the *kohen*. The majority view of Sages is that it is impossible for them both to have been born at exactly the same time, and therefore the *kohen* receives only one of the lambs.

The second category — the possibility of perfectly exact measurement by man — is represented by the case of finding the corpse of a murdered man midway between two cities. The Torah has commanded us (*Devarim 21:1-9*) that if the murdered is unknown, the elders of the city nearest to the corpse must bring a calf to a designated spot and behead it as an act of atonement for their possible negligence in caring for the victim. If the measurement conducted by members of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem results in a conclusion that two cities are exactly equidistant from the corpse, the question arises as to what action is to be taken.

Rabbi Eliezer rules that each of the cities brings a calf for atonement, because it is possible for them to both be exactly the same distance from the corpse, as human measurement has concluded. The majority view of the Sages, however, follows the same pattern as in the first category, where human effort is not involved. They rule that it is impossible for the measurement to be exact and for the cities being exactly equidistant from the corpse. Both cities, therefore, must bring one calf in partnership, and the representatives of each city declare that if their city was farther away, and therefore exempt from any obligation, their portion of the jointly owned calf should revert to the other city which is obligated.

Bechoros 18a

Who's Out First?

"A *klall* (a general term) followed by a *prat* (a particular one)."

"A *klall* which requires a *prat* (for clarification) and a *prat* which requires a *klall* (for clarification)."

These are the fourth and seventh of Rabbi Yishmael's list of 13 rules for interpretation of the Torah which we recite daily in our morning prayers as a minimal fulfillment of our obligation to study Torah daily.

Illustrations of all three methods mentioned in these two rules are provided by our Gemara in explaining how we deduce from the Torah that only a first born male animal is considered a "*bechor*" which must be given to the *kohen* and offered as a sacrifice.

Klall followed by prat — The general term "*bechor*" could be understood as any first-born, male or female. The particular term "*zachar*" limits it to males only.

Klall which requires a prat — The general term "*bechor zachar*" would be understood as a first-born male born by cesarean section, since he is both a male and the firstborn. It is only the particular term "*peter rechem*" which clarifies that a *bechor* is only a male who is the first to come forth from its mother's womb.

Prat which requires a klall — The particular term "*peter rechem*" could be understood as including a male born after an earlier offspring delivered by cesarean section because it is the first male to come forth from its mother's womb. It is the general term "*bechor*" which clarifies that a *bechor* must have both qualities — the first to be born and the first to come forth from the womb.

Bechoros 19a

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