



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת היום

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Tzav 5768

Officially, Purim may have ended, but the festive air of the *Yom Tov* has by no means dissipated. As the effects (hangover or otherwise) of the holiday continue to be felt, it is appropriate to contemplate the various aspects of the Purim experience.

A case in point is this most perplexing *mitzvah* of *ad d'lo yada*—drinking on Purim. Throughout the ages, the *Chachamim* have expressed wonderment concerning this directive; how could *Chazal* have obligated us to partake in an activity which could potentially lead to raucous or even harmful behavior? In fact, as we shall see, some authorities are of the opinion that no such obligation exists.

The source for the *halachah* obligating drinking is the Gemara in Megillah (7b):

אמר רבא מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

“Rava said: a person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he can not differentiate between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai’.”

Immediately following Rava’s statement, the Gemara proceeds to recount the events of the epic Purim *seudah* attended by Rabbah and R’ Zeira:

“Rabbah and R’ Zeira celebrated their Purim *seudah* together, and became inebriated. In his drunken state, Rabbah rose, and slaughtered R’ Zeira. Upon awaking the next morning from his stupor, Rabbah realized what he had done. He immediately beseeched the Almighty on behalf of his unfortunate colleague. Consequently, R’ Zeira was resurrected.

“The following year, Rabbah approached R’ Zeira, and invited him to the annual Purim *seudah*. R’ Zeira, however, was not too keen on the idea. ‘You can’t be too careful about these things,’ he said. ‘A life-saving miracle doesn’t occur every year.’”

At first glance, the juxtaposition of these two passages may seem somewhat strange. Rava tells us a *halachah*, followed by the Gemara’s immediate description of an event where someone’s fulfillment of this *mitzvah* had disastrous consequences.

Indeed, the Rabbeinu Efraim (quoted by the Ran) feels that the intent of the Gemara is clearly a rejection of Rava’s *din*. By recounting this death-defying episode on the heels of Rava’s teaching, the Gemara demonstrates exactly what such a practice can lead to.

The revelers, however, need not be totally discouraged, as other *Rishonim* disagree with Rabbeinu Efraim’s understanding of the issue. The Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim sec. 695*) both quote Rava’s *halachah* verbatim; evidently, both *sefarim* understand the Gemara to be concurring with Rava’s opinion, and therefore *pasken* like him.

The apparent difficulty with the approach of the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, however, is that we are left with the above-mentioned perplexities: what is the meaning of the Gemara’s seemingly incongruous set-up of the topic; and, in general, how are we to understand how *Chazal* mandated such a *mitzvah*? In order to attain the *madreiga* of confusing the fortunes of Haman and Mordechai, one must imbibe quite a bundle of booze! At that point, one’s behavior probably would not be too refined, to say the least.

In his commentary on Shulchan Aruch (*ibid.*), the Yad Efraim expresses similar sentiments. For many years he had been troubled by the nature of this *halachah*. Is it possible that *Chazal* would require us to duplicate the drunkenness of Lot (cf. *Bereishis 19:30-38*)?

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# משנת היום

The Yad Efraim relates how one night, the answer was revealed to him in a dream. The interpretation offered was based on a well-known *sugya* in *Berachos*. The Mishnah there (4:1), which deals with the deadline for *davening shacharis*, states:

תְּפִלַּת הַשַּׁחַר, עַד חֲצוֹת. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אֹמֵר, עַד אַרְבַּע שָׁעוֹת.

“One may recite *shacharis* until midday (12:00 noon on the equinox). R’ Yehudah disagrees, and maintains that one may *daven* only ‘until the fourth hour’.”

The Gemara (*ibid.* 26b) is initially unsure of the precise time to which R’ Yehudah refers. A typical day (again figuring on the equinox) begins at 6:00 AM; thus, the ‘first hour’ lasts from 6:00AM to 7:00AM, and the ‘fourth hour’ goes from 9:00AM to 10:00AM. The *Tanna Kamma*’s opinion is unambiguous; he states that the deadline is exactly 12:00 PM. R’ Yehudah’s given time, however, leaves room for doubt. When he says that one may *daven* until the fourth hour, did he mean ‘until the fourth hour begins’ (9:00 AM), or ‘until the completion of the fourth hour’ (10:00 AM)? In other words, what is the precise meaning of ‘*ad arba sha’os*’ (until the fourth hour): is it ‘*ad v’ad bichlal*’ (until **and including** the fourth hour) or ‘*ad v’lo ad bichlal*’ (until—but **excluding**—the fourth hour)?

The Gemara (*ibid.* 27a) concludes that in this particular instance, ‘until’ means *ad v’ad bichlal*—until and including; therefore, according to R’ Yehudah, the allotted time to recite *shacharis* extends until 10:00 AM.

The same question can be applied to Rava’s *halachah*. “A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he can not differentiate between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai’.” What is the connotation of the word ‘until’? Does it mean *until and including* the state of confusing Haman and Mordechai, or *up until the point* where further drinking would begin to cause the drinker to lose his ability to distinguish between the two?

The Yad Efraim’s ethereal mentor concluded that regarding *ad d’lo yada*, the definition of ‘*ad*’ is ‘*ad v’lo ad bichlal*’—until but **not** including. *Chazal* never intended for us to get ‘smashed out of our *keilim* (mental faculties)’. The reference to confusing Haman and Mordechai is not a recommendation; rather, it is a *shiur* (limit). The *mitzvah* on Purim is to experience *simchah* through drinking wine, yet *Chazal* added a stern warning: make sure to stop before you become so inebriated that you can’t even tell the difference between Haman and Mordechai. To drive home the point, the Gemara follows Rava’s teaching with the hair-raising tale of a Purim *seudah* gone awry.

The above was a brief presentation of a few approaches to the parameters of this *mitzvah*. When it comes to practical application, however, the safest bet is to consult with your ‘L.C.H.A.’ (Local Competent Halachic Authority). *L’Chaim!*

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