



1 Teves 5782  
Dec. 5, 2021

Taanis Daf 23

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamah of

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for his neshamah and may his soul find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

The Mishnah had stated: There was an incident where they sent a message to Choni HaMaagal etc.

The Gemora cites a Baraisa: It happened once that most of the month of Adar had gone by and the rains had yet fallen. The people sent to Choni HaMaagal (the circle-maker): Pray that rain should fall. He prayed but still no rain fell. He then drew a circle on the ground and stood in it, in the same way the Prophet Chavakuk had done, as it stated: I will stand at my post and I will set myself for a siege etc. “Master of the universe,” he cried out, “your children look to me that I’m like a member of Your household, to help them. I swear by Your Great Name, that I will not move from this circle until You have mercy on Your children.” A small drizzle of rain began to fall. “Our teacher,” his students said to him, “we wish to see you and not die. [Such a rain cannot save us.] It seems to us that the heavens are sending it only to release you from your oath.” “This is not the rain I asked for,” Choni then prayed, “rather a rain that will fill water holes, ditches and caves.” The rains then began to fall heavily; each drop like a barrel-full. The rabbis measured them, and found not one of them less than a *log*. “Our teacher,” his students cried to him, “we wish to see you and not die. It seems to us that the rain is not falling except to destroy the world.” “Not for such a rain did I ask,” he then prayed, “rather a rain of good will, of blessing and peace.” The rain then began to fall in the normal way. Soon, however, so much

of it had fallen that the people needed to climb up the Temple Mount to escape the flooding. “Our teacher,” they said to him, “just as you prayed that they should come down, pray now please that they should stop.” “I have a tradition,” he answered them, “that one doesn’t pray to stop an abundance of goodness. Even so, bring me a bull for a confession of sin.<sup>1</sup>” They brought him a bull for confession. He rested his two hands on it, and said before God, “Master of the universe, Your people, Israel, who You brought out of Egypt, cannot survive with an abundance of goodness, or an abundance of punishment. You were angry with them, but they could not live up to Your expectations. You sent Your blessing, and again they couldn’t live up to it. May it be Your will that these rains should stop and the world should again breathe easily.” Immediately the wind blew, scattering the clouds, and the sun shone. The people went out to the fields and brought home truffles and mushrooms (that had sprung up from this rain and all knew that they had merited Heaven’s blessings). Shimon ben Shetach sent to him: “If you were not Choni (whose words to Hashem were so presumptuous), I would decree a ban upon you. For were the years like the years [of famine in the time] of Eliyahu (in whose hands were the keys of rain) would not the name of Heaven be desecrated through you?<sup>2</sup> But what can I do to you, as you misbehaved towards the Omnipresent, and yet He fulfills your requests like a son who misbehaves towards his father, and yet he fulfills his

<sup>1</sup> Some say that it was a todah - thanksgiving offering.

<sup>2</sup> Choni would not have hesitated to force, so to speak, the hand of Heaven even in the face of an oath such as Eliyahu had made in the name of God that there would be no rain for years.

request. The son says to him: Father, take me to bathe me in warm water, wash me off in cold water, give me nuts, almonds, peaches, and pomegranates, and he gives them to him. Regarding people like you it is written: May your father and mother rejoice, and may she who bore you be glad. (23a1 – 23a2)

Our Rabbis have taught in a Baraisa: What was the message that the Members of the Chambers of Hewn Stone (the Great Sanhedrin) sent to Choni HaMaagal? [It was an interpretation of the verse]: You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be fulfilled for you, and light shall shine upon your ways etc. ‘You shall also decree a thing:’ You have decreed [on earth] below and the Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfills your word [in heaven] above. ‘And light shall shine upon your ways:’ You have illumined with your prayer a generation in darkness. ‘If they have fallen down, you shall say: There is lifting up:’ You have raised with your prayer a generation that has sunk low. ‘And a person whose eyes are downcast He saves:’ You have saved by your prayer a generation that is humiliated with sin. ‘He delivers one who is not innocent:’ You have delivered by your prayer a generation that is not innocent. ‘He shall be delivered through the cleanliness of your hands:’ You have delivered it through the deeds of your hands. (23a2 – 23a3)

Rabbi Yochanan said: All his life, Choni HaMaagal was bothered by this verse, “Shir haMa’alos [a song of exaltation], when Hashem returns us to Tzion, we will have been as dreamers,” (the Babylonian exile of 70 years, will all be like one long sleep). “Could it be,” he asked, “that a person can sleep continuously for 70 years?” One day, as he was walking on the road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. “How long will it be,” he asked the man, “before this tree produces fruits?” “Seventy years,” the man answered. “And are you certain you will still be alive

then?” Choni HaMaagal asked. “I was born into a world with carob trees,” the man answered. “Just as my fathers planted trees for me to enjoy, so I plant trees for my children.” Choni HaMaagal then sat down a little distance away, to a meal. He ate and dozed off. A wall of rock sprung up around him, and hid him from view. No one could find him, and so he slept for seventy years. When he awoke from his sleep, he saw [what appeared to be] the same man picking carobs from the tree he had planted. “Are you the man that planted this tree?” he asked him. “No,” answered the man, “I am his grandson.” “I see,” said Choni HaMaagal, “that I must have slept for seventy years.” He then noticed that his donkey had been given birth to donkeys, which in turn, gave birth to still other donkeys. He went to his home. “Is the son of Choni HaMaagal still alive?” he asked. “No,” they answered, “but his grandson is alive.” “I am Choni HaMaagal,” he told them, but they would not believe him. He went to the house of study. There he overheard the rabbis saying that this teaching shines as brightly as in the days of Choni HaMaagal. For when Choni HaMaagal would come to the house of study, he would resolve for them in an excellent way, any difficulties they had. “I am Choni,” he told them, but they would not believe him - and they did not honor him as a scholar of his stature needs to be honored. This hurt him deeply. He prayed for Divine mercy, and he died. “This reflects what people say,” said Rava, “either companionship or death.”<sup>3</sup> (23a3)

Abba Chilkiyah was a grandson of Choni HaMaagal. When there was a need for rain, the rabbis would send to him to pray for rain. On one such occasion when they needed rain, they sent two Torah scholars to him to ask him to pray for mercy that rain should fall. They came to his house, but did not find him at home. They went out to the fields and found him working there. They greeted him, but he did not return the greeting with a smile. Towards

<sup>3</sup> If a person does not receive respect as he is accustomed to receiving, he is better off dead.

evening, he gathered up wood [to take home with him]. The wood and his hoe he carried on his one shoulder, his cloak on the other shoulder. All the way, he did not wear shoes but when he needed to cross through a stream of water, he put them on. When he walked in a place where there were thorns and thistles, he raised his tunic. As he reached home, his wife came out to greet him wearing pretty ornaments. As they entered the house, his wife walked in first, then Abba Chilkiyah and finally the rabbis. Abba Chilkiyah sat down to eat with his family, but did not ask his guests to join them. When dealing out bread to his children, he gave the elder one loaf and the younger two. He said to his wife in a low voice: "I know that these rabbis came on account of rain. Come, let us go up on the roof and pray for rain, and perhaps, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will have mercy on His children and cause it to rain, and we will not need to take credit ourselves." They went up on the roof, and he stood in one corner, while she stood in another. The rain-cloud appeared in the direction where the wife was standing. When he went down again, he said to the rabbis: "What has brought the rabbis here?" And they replied: "The rabbis have sent us to you that you may pray for rain." And he answered: "Blessed be the Omnipresent, that we no longer need Abba Chilkiyah's favor." They said to him: "We well know that this rain has come only on account of the master, still we should like to know the reason for several actions on his part which appear to us surprising. Why, when we greeted the master, did he not turn his face towards us?" He replied: "I hired myself out for the day and my time was not my own, hence I did not wish to waste any." "Why did the master carry the wood on one shoulder and the garment on the other?" He said to them, "Because the garment was borrowed by me to wear, but not to use as a pad for wood." "Why did the master go barefooted all the way, and put on his shoes when coming to water?" "Because the entire way I could see what I was stepping on, but in water I could not." "Why did the master raise his dress

when walking in a thorny path?" "Because if my flesh should receive a scratch, it will heal; but if the garment should become torn it cannot be mended." "Why, when the master came to the city, did his wife come forth to meet him, adorned in jewelry?" He answered them, "In order that I may not look at any other woman." "Why did she enter first, then the master, and then we?" He replied, "Because I know nothing about you." "Why, when the master sat down to eat, did he not invite us to partake also?" "Because there was not sufficient bread for all, and I did not wish to invite you merely to receive your thanks in vain." "Why did the master give the elder child one loaf and the younger two?" "Because the elder was at home all day and probably helped himself previously, but the younger was studying Torah all day and hungrier." Why did the rain-cloud appear first in the master's wife's corner?" "Because a woman is always at home, and when a poor man begs for a meal she always gives it to him readily, while I can but give him a zuz and he must first go and purchase food for it. Thus her charity is more effective than mine." Alternatively, her prayer was answered first because there were local bandits in our neighborhood that I prayed should die but she prayed that they should repent, which they did." (23a4 – 23b2)

Chanan, the hidden one, was the son of the daughter of Choni HaMaagal. When the community needed rain the rabbis would send schoolchildren to him, to soften his heart that his prayers might pour out for them. The children would tug at his coat, begging, "Father, father, give us rain." He would then pray before the Holy One, Blessed be He, "Master of the Universe, do it for the sake of these little ones who cannot discern between a Father Who gives them rain and a father that doesn't have the power to give them rain." And why did they call him Chanan, the hidden one? For when he would pray for rains, in his humility, he would hide himself from public view.<sup>4</sup> (23b2)

<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, he concealed himself even in the privy.

Rabbi Zerika said to Rav Safra: Come and see the difference between the aloof ones of Eretz Yisroel and the pious people in Bavel. Rav Huna and Rav Chisda were the pious ones in Bavel. When there was a need for rain, they said, "Let us gather publicly and ask for compassion from Hashem. Perhaps He will accept our prayers and the rain will come down." Rabbi Yonah, the father of Rabbi Mani was from the aloof ones in Eretz Yisroel. When the community needed rain, they would ask his family to give him a sack that he might buy grain for the house. Then when he was a distance away from the house he would lower himself into a ditch, as it is written: From the depths, I call you, Hashem. He would cover his head with the sack, and pray until rain began to fall. Once the rain was falling, he would go home. "Did you buy grain," his family would ask him. "No," he answered, "when I saw the rain falling, I thought to myself this will bring in new crops -- so why should I buy now when the prices are high?" (23b2 – 23b3)

The Nasi's household would look for ways to trouble and hurt Rabbi Mani, son of Rabbi Yonah (mentioned in the story above). He went and prostrated himself at his father's grave. "Father, father" he cried, "these people are afflicting me." One day these same people passed by the cave where Rabbi Yonah was buried. The feet of their horses stuck to the ground there and they were unable to move at all. The riders, realizing the reason for this phenomenon, accepted on themselves never to hurt with Rabbi Mani again, and the ground released them. (23b3)

Rabbi Mani was a student of Rabbi Yitzchak ben Eliyashiv. Once, he came crying to his teacher. "The rich members of my father-in-laws house," he complained, "trouble and afflict me." "May they become poor," Rabbi Yitzchak told him. Sometime later, he again came to complain before Rabbi Yitzchak. "Now, there are pressuring me to support them," he cried, "They tell me they have nothing to eat." "May they become rich," Rabbi Yitzchak prayed, and so it was. (23b3)

At another time Rabbi Mani came before Rabbi Yitzchak. "My wife is unattractive," he complained, "and I find it difficult to look at her." "What is her name?" Rabbi Yitzchak asked. Rabbi Mani replied, "Channah." "May Channah become beautiful," Rabbi Yitzchak prayed, and so it was. A short while later, Rabbi Mani again came with the complaint. "She is beautiful now," he cried, "and treats me in an arrogant and offhand way." "If so," Rabbi Yitzchak said, "May she again be plain." And so it was. (23b3)

Two students of Rabbi Yitzchak ben Eliyashiv once asked him, "Teacher, pray for us that we should be wise." "Once, I could do this," he answered them, "whatever I would pray for, the heavens would grant me. Now, I have returned this power to the heavens, and my prayers are not accepted so easily." [However, he told them this so as not to trouble the heavens too greatly.] (23b3)

#### INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

#### VENTURING OUTSIDE ON SHABBOS

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa* which expounds on a verse in Vayikra (26:4) which states "I will give your rains in their time." The blessing described here is that the earth will not be drunk (overly drenched) with rain, nor will it be thirsty; rather it will be reasonably wet. Excessive rain makes the earth muddy and it will not be able to produce fruit.

An alternative explanation is that the "proper time" is referring to Tuesday and Friday nights. Generally, people are not outside on these nights and therefore the rains will not be a nuisance to them.

Rashi explains that people do not generally walk outside on these nights because there is a demon Igras bas Machlas who causes damage then. The Ibn Ezra (Shmos



20:13) explains why it is that this demon comes out and haunts on these particular nights.

In the Teshuvos Az Nidb'ru, he rules that it is improper to go touring or to venture out for a walk on Friday night. He states that it is desecrating the Shabbos and can be extremely harmful. Shabbos is a day that is given to us to busy ourselves with Torah and Yiras Shamayim.

He cites the Medrash in Eichah that the reason a certain city was destroyed was because they played ball on Shabbos. He asks that playing ball on Shabbos is only a Rabbinical injunction lest one might level the holes in the ground. Why was this prohibition treated so severely? He answers that it wasn't the particular sin that caused the tragedy, rather it was that they were treating Shabbos as if it was a regular day of the week. They were acting like the gentiles. He concludes that taking extended walks on Shabbos is precisely the opposite of what Shabbos was intended for.

The Ben Ish Chai writes that even though an outing on Shabbos is enjoyable, nevertheless one will be judged regarding this in the future. If someone would approach in middle of your business to join him in an outing, you will obviously refuse even though you know it will provide pleasure, so too, the Shabbos was given to be utilized for spiritual pleasure by studying Torah and not to venture outside, which will not lead to any positive spiritual outcome.

However, the Rama (301:2) rules that it is permitted to take walks on Shabbos. The Rama even rules that it is regarded as a mitzvah and one would be permitted to make an eruv techumin (which is only permitted for a mitzvah) allowing him to walk outside of his two thousand amos boundary. Tosfos Shabbos disagrees and maintains that only on Yom Tov would it be permitted to make an eruv techumin for the sake of taking an extended walk but

on Shabbos, it is prohibited because walking is not considered a mitzvah.

DAILY MASHAL

PROPORTIONAL MEASUREMENTS

In the days of Shimon ben Shetach, the rains would fall on Tuesday and Friday nights, when people are at home. The blessing was so great that wheat grains were the size of kidneys -- barley, the size of olives -- lentils, the size of golden dinarim.

The Chasam Sofer asks that it's logical to assume that all the fruits that grow in Eretz Yisroel were extremely large and not only the ones mentioned. If so, how can we derive from this passuk the Biblical measurements for many different halachos? Was a standard olive used or a large one that grew in Eretz Yisroel during the time of blessing?

Chasam Sofer states that in the same manner that the fruits were blessed to grow much larger than usual, so too the people were much larger and healthier. The required measurements for people living in Eretz Yisroel were considerably larger than people residing elsewhere but proportionally, it was the same.