

Bekhorot 12 Detailed Summary

Coverage: Bekhorot 12a - 12b

Bekhorot 12 asks exactly what qualifies as the **שה** used to redeem a firstborn donkey. The Mishnah excludes a calf, a wild animal, a slaughtered animal, a tereifah, a sheep-goat hybrid, and a **כוי**, while Rabbi Eliezer permits the hybrid but not the uncertain koy. The Gemara then tests how far the Torah's shared word **שה** links this redemption to the Korban Pesach and whether the legal category follows the animal's parentage, its appearance, or both.

The daf next introduces Shemittah value. An animal purchased with Sabbatical-year produce carries **קדושת שביעית**, so the Gemara asks whether such an animal may be used to redeem a definite or doubtful firstborn donkey and whether its offspring can become a sanctified firstborn animal. The answer turns on the Torah's requirement that Shemittah property be used **לאכלה** - for consumption - rather than commerce or mandated burning.

The final unit asks when the redemption act becomes complete and who bears the risk if the redemption lamb dies. Rabbi Eliezer compares the owner's responsibility to **פדיון הבן**, while the Sages compare it to money designated for **מעשר שני**. Throughout the daf, the Gemara repeatedly limits analogies: a shared word or juxtaposition can teach a specific rule, but it does not erase the independent structure of the mitzvot being compared.

The detailed summary begins on the next page and follows the daf in sequence, explaining the questions, answers, proofs, distinctions, and conclusions needed to understand the sugya as a whole.

Detailed Summary

The Mishnah: which animals may be used for redemption?

אין פודין לא בעגל ולא בחיה, לא בשחוטא ולא בטריפה, ולא בכלאים ולא בכוי. ורבי אליעזר מתיר בכלאים מפני שהוא שה, ואוסר בכוי מפני שהוא ספק.

The Mishnah defines the Torah's redemption object narrowly. The owner cannot simply give the Kohen an animal of equal or greater value. The Torah specified a living **שה**, and the sugya now determines the boundaries of that category. The anonymous view excludes a calf, an undomesticated animal, a slaughtered animal, a tereifah, a hybrid, and a koy. Rabbi Eliezer agrees about most of the list but permits a sheep-goat hybrid because both parents are within the sheep/goat family, while he rejects a koy because its underlying species status is uncertain.

How far the comparison to Korban Pesach extends

Ben Bag Bag learns from the repeated word **שה** in the laws of firstborn-donkey redemption and Korban Pesach that certain animals excluded from Pesach are also excluded here. Rav Ashi immediately limits the comparison. A Korban Pesach must be male, unblemished, and within its first year, yet those requirements do not govern every ordinary redemption lamb. The shared word therefore imports a defined category, not the entire body of Pesach law.

This is a major methodological point of the daf: a **גזירה שוה** or other textual linkage is powerful, but one must still ask which feature the Torah intends to transfer from one mitzvah to the other.

An animal that looks like another species

The Gemara asks whether a lamb born from sheep parents but resembling another species, a **נדמה**, can be used. According to Rabbi Eliezer, the answer should be straightforward: if a genuine sheep-goat hybrid is acceptable, then an animal whose actual parentage is pure but whose appearance is unusual should certainly be acceptable. The real question is according to the Sages.

A baraita about a cow that gives birth to offspring resembling a goat becomes the test case. The initial inference is that appearance might define the offspring. The Gemara rejects that reading and says that the legal category follows the mother: an offspring born from a cow remains a calf for this purpose even when it looks goat-like.

Rashi (ד"ה פרה שילדה מין עז אין פורין)

Rashi explains the ruling in the most concrete way: the goat-like appearance does not make the animal a usable ששה, because its maternal identity makes it an עגל, a calf. The sugya therefore gives ancestry priority over superficial form.

The Kohen may not simply keep the donkey

The Mishnah adds that if the owner hands the firstborn donkey itself to a Kohen, the Kohen may not keep it in its unredeemed state. He must first set aside a lamb in its place. A baraita makes the concern practical: if a Kohen says, “Give me the donkey and I will redeem it,” the owner should not hand it over unless the redemption is performed in his presence.

The issue is not a blanket suspicion of Kohanim. The structure of the transaction creates a special temptation, because the Kohen will ultimately keep the redemption lamb as well. Halachah therefore requires the formal act that removes the donkey’s firstborn status before ordinary ownership and use continue.

Can Shemittah value be used?

The Gemara asks whether the redemption lamb may be an animal purchased with produce of the Sabbatical year, so that קדושת שביעית now rests on the animal. For a definite firstborn donkey, the answer is no. The Torah says Shemittah produce is לאכלה, for consumption, and not for commerce. In definite redemption, giving the animal to the Kohen releases a donkey of greater value to the owner, creating the sort of exchange that the Shemittah restriction blocks.

For a doubtful firstborn donkey, Rav Chisda distinguishes the case. The owner may need to designate an animal to remove the possible prohibition, but because the Kohen cannot prove entitlement, the redemption animal can remain with the owner. The absence of a compulsory commercial transfer changes the Shemittah analysis.

Shemittah property and a firstborn kosher animal

Rav Chisda adds that an animal purchased with Shemittah produce is exempt from having its own firstborn offspring sanctified for the altar. A firstborn kosher animal is not purely an eating mitzvah: its sacrificial portions, the אימורים, are burned. Shemittah value is designated for consumption and may not be routed into a mitzvah whose primary structure includes burning.

The Gemara challenges from חלה. Dough made from Shemittah produce is still obligated in challah even though challah can ultimately be burned if it becomes impure. The answer is that challah’s primary destiny is eating; burning is only an exceptional consequence. With a firstborn offering, altar-burning is intrinsic to the mitzvah.

A second Mishnah: the redemption lamb dies

המפריש פדיון פטר חמור ומת, רבי אליעזר אומר: חייבין באחריותו כחמש סלעים של בן; וחכמים אומרים: אין חייבין באחריותו כפדיון מעשר שני.

The second Mishnah asks when the owner's responsibility ends. He has designated the lamb, but it dies before reaching the Kohen. Rabbi Eliezer says the owner remains responsible and must replace it, comparing the obligation to the five sela of פדיון הבן. The Sages say he does not remain responsible, comparing the case to money already designated for redeeming מעשר שני.

Rav Yosef explains Rabbi Eliezer through the Torah's juxtaposition of the firstborn son and the firstborn non-kosher animal. Abaye asks how far that juxtaposition travels: if the cases were identical in every respect, then the pre-redemption benefit rules should also be identical. Rava therefore limits the היקש to the rule actually learned from it - continuing responsibility for the redemption - rather than treating the two mitzvot as interchangeable.

What the daf establishes

Bekhorot 12 is built around disciplined categorization. A שֶה is not simply any item of value; appearance does not necessarily override maternal species; Shemittah property may not be redirected into every religious transaction; and a textual comparison transfers only the rule supported by the verse. The daf repeatedly asks not merely whether two cases resemble one another, but exactly which legal feature the Torah tells us to compare.

Glossary

Hebrew term	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
שֶה	Seh	The sheep-or-goat category specified for redeeming a firstborn donkey.
כלאים	Kilayim	A sheep-goat hybrid.
כוי	Koy	An animal of uncertain domesticated/wild classification.
נדמה	Nidmeh	An animal whose appearance resembles a different species.
קדושת שביעית	Kedushat shevi'it	The sanctified usage restrictions attached to Sabbatical-year produce and its exchanged value.
לאכלה	Le'okhlah	"For consumption," used to restrict commercial or destructive use of Shemittah value.
היקש	Hekesh	A Torah juxtaposition linking two laws for a defined legal inference.

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