

Bekhorot 21 Detailed Summary

Coverage: Bekhorot 21a - 21b

Bekhorot 21 finishes the compressed-reproduction sugya from the previous daf and then explores several distinct but connected ways of identifying an earlier pregnancy. The Gemara asks what exactly separates the first Tanna from Rabbi Shimon in the case of the goat and its daughters: Zeiri's thirty-day rule after טינוף, birth after incomplete gestation, the rule that part of a day counts as a full day, or the status of an animal that is still מחוסר זמן for sacrifice but is being counted for animal tithe. The discussion ultimately compares animal tithe to firstborn sanctity and derives Rabbi Shimon's position through the shared Torah expression העברה.

The daf then defines טינוף more concretely. Rava and Shmuel describe the physical discharge, and the Gemara requires that it be evaluated by an experienced shepherd rather than by an ordinary scholar who lacks the practical expertise. Rav Chisda asks how long fetal formation takes in animals, comparing the question to the forty-day formation period known in human law. The discussion clarifies that Zeiri's thirty days refer not to fetal formation but to the interval before the mother is ready to conceive again.

The second half shifts from animals purchased from non-Jews to animals purchased from Jews. Rav, Shmuel, and Rabbi Yochanan read the seller's silence differently: Rav treats the next birth as certainly firstborn, Shmuel as doubtful, and Rabbi Yochanan as certainly ordinary because a Jewish seller would have warned the buyer if the animal had never yet given birth. A baraita supports Rabbi Yochanan but is reconciled with Rav and Shmuel by distinguishing whether the burden of disclosure rests on the seller or whether the buyer's intended use changes the expectation. The daf closes with Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov's Mishnah: a large animal that expels a mass of congealed blood is exempt from future firstborn status, yet the mass does not transmit carcass impurity. That paradox begins the next daf's inquiry into burial, publicity, and nullification.

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 full discussion.

Detailed Summary

Finishing the goat chronology: four possible points of dispute

The Gemara asks what practical difference separates the first Tanna from Rabbi Shimon's statement that he saw a goat "tithe within its year." One answer is Zeiri's rule: after טינוף, the animal cannot conceive again for thirty days. If the daughters experienced the equivalent reproductive interruption, the timetable may push their births beyond the year. Rabbi Shimon can reject Zeiri's timing.

A second answer says both accept Zeiri, but they dispute whether gestation can end after incomplete months. A third says both require full months but disagree whether part of the final day counts as the whole day. A fourth says they agree on those timing rules and instead dispute whether an animal that is still מחוסר זמן may already enter the pen for animal tithe.

Can a מחוסר זמן animal be tithed?

The Gemara cites Rabbi Shimon ben Yehuda in the name of Rabbi Shimon: an animal that has not yet reached the minimum sacrificial age may enter the pen to be tithed. He compares animal tithe to a firstborn: a firstborn becomes sacred automatically before it is old enough to be offered, and is sacrificed only after the proper time arrives. So too, animal tithe can become sacred before the animal is fit to be brought.

The Gemara asks why tithe should be learned from firstborn rather than from ordinary consecrated offerings, where an under-age animal cannot yet be consecrated in the same way. It lists similarities on both sides. The final foundation for Rabbi Shimon is a verbal tradition: the word העברה appears both in firstborn and animal tithe, creating a direct linkage between the two categories.

Rashi (ד"ה מה בכור קדוש לפני זמנו)

Rashi explains that firstborn sanctity begins from the womb even though the animal may not yet be offered. Rabbi Shimon uses that model to show that legal sanctity can precede sacrificial eligibility.

What exactly counts as טינוף?

Rava describes טינוף in the language used by shepherds: the womb has closed or the developing material has deteriorated. Shmuel describes visible bubbles or masses of blood. The material must be shown to someone qualified to identify it.

The Gemara asks how an ordinary Torah scholar can know enough animal biology to judge it. Rav Pappa answers that the relevant "expert" is a knowledgeable shepherd. Practical experience is part of the halachic fact-finding process here; the legal result depends on correctly identifying a real reproductive event rather than merely seeing blood.

How long does fetal formation take in an animal?

Rav Chisda notes that in human law fetal formation is associated with forty days and asks for the comparable period in an animal. Rav Pappa suggests Zeiri's thirty-day statement, but Abaye rejects the proof. Zeiri was not speaking about how long it takes an embryo to form. His rule concerns when the mother becomes receptive to mating again after a reproductive discharge. The two clocks - fetal formation and renewed fertility - answer different questions and cannot simply be substituted for one another.

Buying from a Jewish seller: Rav, Shmuel, and Rabbi Yochanan

The Gemara now asks what happens when the female animal is purchased from a Jew rather than a non-Jew. Rav says the next male is certainly a firstborn. His reasoning is that if the animal had already given birth, the seller would have mentioned that favorable fact. Shmuel says the offspring remains doubtful because the seller may have assumed the buyer intended to slaughter the animal and therefore did not need information about future firstborn status.

Rabbi Yochanan goes in the opposite direction: the offspring is certainly ordinary. If the animal had never yet given birth, a Jewish seller who knows the prohibition and the buyer's potential firstborn obligation would be expected to disclose that fact. Silence therefore indicates that the animal had already given birth.

Rashi (ד"ה אשתבוחי הוה משתבח ליה)

Rashi reads Rav's assumption as a selling point tied to firstborn law: a previously proven mother is more attractive because the purchaser will not lose the next offspring to the Kohen as a firstborn.

Tosafot (ד"ה רבי יוחנן)

Tosafot compare the three positions with parallel cases of sales and disclosure. The seller's silence has legal meaning only after we ask what information a reasonable seller would expect to matter to this particular purchaser.

The baraita supporting Rabbi Yochanan

A baraita says that if the seller did not inform the buyer, the buyer may proceed to slaughter without hesitation, supporting Rabbi Yochanan's view that silence indicates there is no firstborn concern. The Gemara asks whether this refutes Rav and Shmuel. It answers that the cases can differ according to whose conduct is legally significant. In one formulation the rule turns on the seller's obligation to disclose; in the other, the buyer's purpose and assumptions remain relevant. The baraita therefore supports Rabbi Yochanan without forcing the Gemara to erase the alternative reasoning entirely.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov: a discharged mass of blood

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר: בהמה גסה שש פעה חררת דם - הרי זו ת ק בר, ופטורה מן הבכורה.

The Mishnah returns to the earlier theme of recognizing an event that can exempt the womb. Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov rules that when a large animal expels a mass of congealed blood, the mass is buried and the mother is exempt from future firstborn status. The discharge is treated as evidence that a pregnancy or fetal process occurred.

Rabbi Chiya adds a surprising limitation: the mass does not transmit impurity by touch or by carrying. The Gemara immediately asks: if it does not have the impurity status of an actual carcass, why must it be buried? That tension - significant enough to exempt from firstborn status and require burial, yet not impure as a carcass - becomes the starting point of Bekhorot 22.

Glossary

Hebrew term	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
מחוסר זמן	Mechusar zeman	An animal not yet old enough to be offered as a sacrifice.
העברה	Ha'avarah	A shared Torah term linking firstborn and animal tithe in this sugya.
טינוף	Tinuf	A reproductive discharge that may establish an earlier conception or miscarriage.
רועה חכם	Ro'eh chacham	An experienced shepherd qualified to identify the biological signs relevant to the halachah.
בכור ודאי	Bekhor vadai	An offspring treated as certainly firstborn.
בכור ספק	Bekhor safek	An offspring whose firstborn status remains uncertain.
חולין ודאין	Chullin vada'in	An offspring treated as certainly ordinary, non-sacred property.
חררת דם	Chararat dam	A mass of congealed blood discharged by a large animal, significant for firstborn law.

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