Bekhorot 24

Daf Yomi · Monday, October 12, 2026 · א׳ חשון תשפ״ז · Covers 24b (Mishnah of R. Yose ben HaMeshullam on slaughtering a firstborn) through 25a (plucking hair to show a blemish)

Summary

Bekhorot 24 presents R. Yose ben HaMeshullam's Mishnah: one who slaughters a blemished firstborn may clear a place for the cleaver on each side of the neck and pluck the hair, provided he does not move it from its place. Likewise he may pluck hair to show the place of a blemish. Rav rules like R. Yose ben HaMeshullam, and the Amoraim ask whether this permits plucking hair from an ordinary animal's neck on a festival. That depends on whether R. Yose permits plucking because plucking is not shearing, or because the act is unintended. Rav Huna's students learn from Rav Chananel that Rav ruled like R. Yose, and Rav Huna permits it on a festival.

The Gemara tests this against Rav's view that an unintended act is forbidden, his ruling on pressing a wrapped spigot into a barrel on a festival, and his ruling like R. Yehuda. It concludes that Rav forbids unintended acts and holds that plucking is not shearing; on a festival, plucking is permitted as uprooting in an unusual manner. The Gemara asks whether plucking a bird's feathers is shearing, and whether R. Yose ben HaMeshullam also forbids unintended acts, using the case of the red heifer with two dark-tipped hairs. Finally, R. Ashi limits plucking to the hand, and a Mishnah on wool tangled in the ear shows that plucking to reveal a blemish is permitted from the start.

Detailed Summary

1. Mishnah: clearing the place for slaughter 24b

The preceding lines of 24b complete Achai's unresolved question about a pig nursing from a ewe (summary of Bekhorot 23).

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 24b)

רבי יוסי בן המשולם אומר: השוחט את הבכור, עושה מקום בקופיץ מיכן ומיכן, ותולש את השער, ובלבד שלא יזיזנו ממקומו. וכן תולש את השער לראות מקום מום.

R. Yose ben HaMeshullam says: one who slaughters the firstborn makes a place with the cleaver on this side and that (Rashi: he clears the hair on both sides from the place where the knife cuts), and plucks the hair (Rashi: we do not say he is shearing the firstborn), provided he does not move it from its place (Rashi: so people will not say he sheared consecrated animals; he leaves it tangled in the wool). Likewise he plucks the hair to see the place of a blemish (Rashi: to show it to a sage).

Tosafot – ד"ה השוחט את הבכור עושה מקום בקופיץ

QUESTION. The Gemara reads "for the cleaver," implying people slaughter with a cleaver rather than a knife. But in Pesachim (70a), a knife found on the fourteenth may be used immediately, while a cleaver must be immersed again, since a cleaver is unfit for the Pesach offering because it breaks bones.

ANSWER. The Mishnah mentions a cleaver because it needs a larger cleared space than a knife; a cleaver does not cut comfortably without one. Rashi's explanation, that the space prevents the knife from being hidden, does not fit, since that concern would apply more to a knife. The Mishnah speaks of a firstborn because consecrated animals are slaughtered in the Temple courtyard where knives are ready, because the firstborn applies today, and because its wool grows long while it waits for a blemish.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The Mishnah addresses a practical problem of slaughtering a long-haired firstborn.

2. On a festival 24b–25a

THE QUESTION. Rav said: the law follows R. Yose ben HaMeshullam. They asked Rav Huna: what about the equivalent for an ordinary animal on a festival (Rashi: may one do this for slaughter)? Is R. Yose ben HaMeshullam's reason that plucking is not shearing (Rashi: shearing is what is forbidden for a firstborn)? If so, on a festival it is forbidden, since it is uprooting something from where it grows. Or perhaps in general R. Yose holds plucking is shearing, and the reason he permits it is that it is an unintended act, and on a festival an unintended act is permitted?

Rashi – ד"ה שאין מתכוין

THE ISSUE. In what sense is the plucking unintended?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. He does not intend to pluck, only to move the hair aside this way and that; if it is plucked, it is plucked.

WHY IT MATTERS. If this is the reason, the act would be permitted on a festival as well.

RAV CHANANEL. He said to them: go ask Rav Chananel (Rashi: Rav's student). If he says the law follows R. Yose ben HaMeshullam, I will resolve it for you. They asked him, and he said: so said Rav, the law follows R. Yose ben HaMeshullam. They came before Rav Huna, and he told them: the equivalent on a festival is permitted. It was also stated: Rav Chananya bar Shelamya said in the name of Rav: the equivalent on a festival is permitted (Rashi: since the reason is that it is unintended).

3. Does Rav permit unintended acts? 25a

THE SPIGOT. Did Rav say so? But Rav Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: a spigot of a barrel may not be pressed in on a festival.

Rashi – ד"ה מסוכריא דנזייתא

THE ISSUE. What is the spigot, and why is it forbidden?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. It is the barrel's plug, around which they wrap tow and rags to seal the hole well. Pressing it in forcefully squeezes out liquid. Although he does not intend to squeeze, it is forbidden even according to R. Shimon, who permits unintended acts.

WHY IT MATTERS. The case seems to show Rav forbidding an unintended act.

AN INEVITABLE RESULT. There, even R. Shimon agrees, as Abaye and Rava both said: R. Shimon agrees where it is "cutting off its head and it will not die" (Rashi: pressing the plug inevitably squeezes, but moving the hair can be done without plucking).

RAV FOLLOWS R. YEHUDA. But Rav Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: the law follows R. Yehuda; and Rav Chanan bar Ami said in the name of Shmuel: the law follows R. Shimon. Rav Chiya bar Avin taught it without the names: Rav said the law follows R. Yehuda, and Shmuel said the law follows R. Shimon (Rashi: so Rav forbids unintended acts).

THE CONCLUSION. Rather, in truth Rav holds that an unintended act is forbidden, and plucking is not shearing. On a festival, the reason it is permitted is that it is uprooting something from where it grows in an unusual manner.

Rashi – ד"ה כלאחר יד

THE ISSUE. Why is plucking "in an unusual manner"?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. It is not the normal way to pluck wool; the normal way is to shear it.

WHY IT MATTERS. An unusual act is not the forbidden labor on a festival.

Tosafot – ד"ה דהוה ליה עוקר דבר מגידולו כלאחר יד

CLARIFICATION. One may not learn from here that plucking feathers from a bird's neck to slaughter it on a festival is permitted. Feathers are normally plucked, so that is not an unusual manner, as the baraita below shows. And although the feathers are not needed, a labor not needed for its own sake cannot be learned from an unusual manner.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The leniency is limited to wool, which is normally shorn.

4. Plucking feathers 25a

THE BARAITA. But is plucking not shearing? It was taught: one who plucks a feather, trims it and smooths it is liable for three sin offerings. Reish Lakish said: plucking is liable as shearing, trimming as cutting, and smoothing as scraping. A feather is different, since that is its normal way (Rashi: feathers are normally plucked, not shorn).

5. R. Yose ben HaMeshullam and unintended acts 25a

THE RED HEIFER. Since Rav holds like R. Yose ben HaMeshullam, R. Yose ben HaMeshullam holds like Rav that an unintended act is forbidden? But it was taught: two hairs whose roots are red and whose tips are black, R. Yose ben HaMeshullam says he shears them with scissors and need not worry.

Rashi – ד"ה גוזז

THE ISSUE. Why may he shear the red heifer?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. He shears the black tips with scissors, leaving the red part, and need not worry about shearing consecrated animals, since he does not intend shearing but repair. Two fully black hairs disqualify the heifer entirely, but these can be repaired.

WHY IT MATTERS. R. Yose seems to permit an act done without the intent of the forbidden labor.

NOT SUBJECT TO SHEARING? A heifer is different, since it is not subject to shearing (Rashi: cows have no wool). But it was taught: "you shall not work the firstborn of your ox, and you shall not shear the firstborn of your flock" (Devarim 15:19). I have only an ox for work and a flock for shearing; whence to apply each to the other? The verse says "not work... and not shear."

TEMPLE UPKEEP. Rather, the heifer is different, since it is consecrated for Temple upkeep (Rashi: it is not offered on the altar, so shearing it is permitted). But R. Elazar said: Temple upkeep consecrations are forbidden for shearing and work by rabbinic law, so there is a rabbinic prohibition! Rather, the heifer is different, since it is uncommon (Rashi: the Sages did not decree on what is uncommon).

REDEMPTION. Let him redeem it, shear it, and consecrate it again. Its value is high (Rashi: its value is not readily available to redeem it). Let him do as Shmuel said, for Shmuel said: consecrated property worth a *maneh* that was redeemed for the value of a *perutah* is redeemed. Granted Shmuel said so after the fact; did he say so from the start?

ANOTHER ANSWER. Alternatively, Rav holds like R. Yose ben HaMeshullam, but R. Yose ben HaMeshullam does not hold like Rav.

Tosafot – ד"ה גוזז במספרים ואינו חושש

CLARIFICATION. That is, even if he shears other hairs unintentionally, he may shear these hairs more than needed. Rashi explains that the proof is that he is permitted because he does not intend shearing but repair. This is unlike an ordinary unintended act, since he deliberately shears with scissors.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The case shows a looser standard of intent than the usual unintended act.

6. By hand, and to show a blemish 25a

R. ASHI. "And he plucks the hair, provided he does not move it from its place." R. Ashi said in the name of Reish Lakish: this was taught only by hand, but with a tool it is forbidden. But it teaches "he makes a place with the cleaver on this side and that"! Read: "for the cleaver" (Rashi: for the cleaver's sake).

FROM THE START? "Likewise he plucks the hair to see a blemish." It was asked: from the start, or after the fact? R. Yirmeya said: come and hear: wool tangled in the ear (Rashi: and the blemish was in the ear), R. Yose ben HaMeshullam says he plucks it and shows the blemish. Learn from this: from the start. Learn from this.

RAV MARI. Rav Mari said: we too learned it: "likewise one who plucks the hair to see the place of a blemish." What is "likewise"? If it means he may not move it from its place, now, if one who slaughters, whose slaughter shows his intent (Rashi: that he did not intend shearing), may not move it, is it necessary to say that one who looks at a blemish may not? Rather, it refers to plucking: learn from this, from the start. Learn from this.

The next Mishnah, on the fallen hair of a blemished firstborn, begins on 25a and is covered in the summary of Bekhorot 25.

The full picture in plain language

A firstborn may not be shorn, even once it is blemished and ready to be slaughtered and eaten. R. Yose ben HaMeshullam allows the slaughterer to clear the wool from the neck and pluck what is in the way, as long as he leaves it in the fleece, and to pluck hair to reveal a blemish to a sage. Rav accepts his view, and the Gemara asks why: is plucking simply not shearing, or is the plucking an unintended side effect of moving the wool aside?

The question matters for festivals, when uprooting is normally forbidden. Comparing Rav's other rulings, the Gemara concludes that Rav forbids unintended acts, so his reason must be that plucking is not shearing. On a festival, plucking wool is permitted as an unusual act, although plucking feathers, which is their normal treatment, would not be. The daf ends by confirming that plucking to reveal a blemish is permitted from the start.

Glossary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
קופיץ	*kofitz*	A cleaver used for slaughter.
תולש	*tolesh*	Plucks hair or wool by hand.
גוזז	*gozez*	Shears, forbidden for a firstborn.
דבר שאין מתכוין	*davar she-eino mitkaven*	An unintended result of a permitted act.
פסיק רישיה	*pesik reishei*	An inevitable result, treated as intended.
כלאחר יד	*ke-le'achar yad*	In an unusual manner.
פרה אדומה	*parah adumah*	The red heifer.

Sources: Gemara with relevant Rashi and Tosafot.