Bekhorot 29

Daf Yomi · Shabbat, October 17, 2026 · ו׳ חשון תשפ״ז · Covers 29a (Mishnah on taking a fee to judge) through 30a (the butcher and the nuts)

Summary

Bekhorot 29 opens with a Mishnah on people who take payment for religious functions. One who takes a fee to judge has his judgments void; to testify, his testimony void; to sprinkle or sanctify the purification waters, his water is plain cave water and his ashes are plain ashes. However, if someone who needs him makes him lose income or convenience, he may be compensated. If he is a kohen and must become impure on the way, the other person feeds and anoints him; if he is old, he provides a donkey; and he pays him as a worker. The Gemara derives the rule against payment from Moshe's words, "See, I have taught you": just as I taught for free, so you must teach for free. It adds that if one cannot find a free teacher, he should pay, but one who learned for pay may not then charge for teaching. A contradiction about payment for purification water is resolved by distinguishing payment for carrying from payment for the ritual act itself. The Gemara also explains how a kohen may travel through a field with a crushed grave, and how "a worker" is paid: as an idle worker of that trade.

Three Mishnayot then deal with people suspected of violating a law, and what one may buy from them. From one suspected of misusing firstborns (Rashi: e.g., blemishing them deliberately), one may not buy "deer meat," which can be confused with calf meat, or untanned hides, but may buy tanned hides, female hides (R. Eliezer), and spun wool or garments, though not washed wool. The Gemara explains each case by the effort the suspect would invest, or avoid, if the item came from a firstborn. From one suspected about the Sabbatical year, one may not buy flax, even combed, but may buy spun or woven flax.

From one suspected of selling terumah as ordinary produce, R. Yehuda forbids buying even water and salt, and R. Shimon forbids anything subject to terumah and tithes, including fish innards mixed with olive oil. The daf ends with a butcher who sold forbidden kidney fat as permitted fat. Rava penalized him by forbidding him to sell even nuts. Rav Pappa asked whom this follows, and the Gemara answers that it follows R. Shimon: the penalty is tied to the means of the sin, since he lured the butchers' children with nuts to steal the fat.

Detailed Summary

1. Mishnah: payment for judging, testifying and purifying 29a

The first lines of 29a complete the Mishnah and Gemara on an examiner who takes a fee for firstborns (summary of Bekhorot 28). The new Mishnah extends the theme to other religious services.

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 29a)

הנוטל שכרו לדון דיניו בטילים, להעיד עדותיו בטילין, להזות ולקדש מימיו מי מערה אפרו אפר מקלה. אם היה כהן מטמאהו מתרומתו, מאכילו ומשקו וסכו, ואם היה זקן מרכיבו על החמור, ונותן לו שכרו כפועל.

One who takes payment to judge: his judgments are void. To testify: his testimony is void. To sprinkle (purification water) or to sanctify it (Rashi: to mix the red heifer's ashes with spring water): his water is cave water and his ashes are ordinary ashes. If he (the judge, witness or sprinkler) was a kohen, and the one who needs him makes him impure so that he cannot eat his terumah (Rashi: leading him through an impure place), he must feed him, give him drink and anoint him (Rashi: since ordinary food costs more than terumah); if he was old, he provides him a donkey to ride; and he pays him as a worker.

Tosafot – ד"ה הנוטל שכרו לדון דיניו בטלים

QUESTION. A Mishnah (Ketubot 105a) says: "ugly is the judge who takes payment to judge, but his judgments stand."

ANSWER. The Gemara there explains that it refers to payment for lost work that is clearly evident, which is permitted.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Compensation for real lost income is allowed; payment for the judging itself voids the ruling.

2. "See, I have taught you": teaching for free 29a

SOURCE. Rav Yehuda citing Rav: the verse says, "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments, as Hashem my God commanded me" (Devarim 4:5): just as I (taught) for free, so you (must teach) for free.

BARAITA. "As Hashem my God commanded me": just as I for free, so you for free. And from where that if he cannot find someone to teach him for free, he should learn for pay? It says, "buy truth" (Mishlei 23:23). And from where that he should not say, "just as I learned for pay, so I will teach for pay"? It says, "buy truth and do not sell it."

Tosafot – ד"ה מה אני בחנם כו'

QUESTION. Why does the Torah need "you shall not take a bribe" (Shemot 23:8)?

ANSWER. They are two different things, as Ketubot 105a shows. A fee is payment for the judge's effort; a bribe is payment to argue one side, even to acquit the innocent. The judges of decrees in Jerusalem, paid from the Temple chamber, are no difficulty: apart from evident lost income, their whole occupation was judging and they had to support themselves.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot separate the prohibition of a fee from the prohibition of bribery.

3. Payment for purification water 29a

CONTRADICTION. "To sprinkle or sanctify: his water is cave water." But a Mishnah says: one who betroths a woman with purification water or ashes, she is betrothed, even though he is an Israelite (Rashi: so they have monetary value, and one may be paid for them).

ABAYE. No difficulty: there, payment for bringing (the ashes) and drawing (the water); here, payment for sprinkling and sanctifying. The wording supports this: here it says "to sprinkle and sanctify," and there it says "with purification water and ashes."

Rashi – ד"ה כאן שכר הזאה וקידוש · ד"ה שכר

THE ISSUE. What exactly may he be paid for?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. Bringing the ashes from far away to Jerusalem, and drawing the water: he may take payment for his labor, not for performing the mitzvah. Sprinkling and sanctifying are the mitzvah itself, for which he may not take payment.

WHY IT MATTERS. The line falls between labor around the mitzvah and the mitzvah act itself.

Tosafot – ד"ה המקדש במי חטאת ואפר חטאת הרי זו מקודשת אע"פ שהוא ישראל

QUESTION. Rashi explains "even though he is an Israelite" as because kohanim usually do the sprinkling; that is forced.

ANSWER. R. Yitzchak explains that the phrase belongs mainly to the first clause of that Mishnah (Kiddushin 58a): one who betroths with terumah, tithes and priestly gifts.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The phrase is borrowed from its context, not a statement about purification water.

4. A kohen in a field with a crushed grave 29a–29b

QUESTION. "If he was a kohen, he makes him impure": how may the kohen himself go? (Rashi: he would violate "he shall not become impure for a dead person.") **ANSWER.** Through a *beit ha-peras* (Rashi: a field in which a grave was plowed), which is rabbinic, as Rav Yehuda citing Rav said: a person may blow (on the ground) in a *beit ha-peras* and walk.

Rashi – ד"ה כדרב יהודה מנפח אדם בית הפרס והולך

THE ISSUE. How does blowing help?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. A barley-grain-sized bone defiles by touching and carrying, not by tent. By blowing, he pushes it away and does not touch it. Still, he may not eat terumah afterward, since Chagigah 25b says one examines for those bringing the Pesach but not for those eating terumah, and that "examination" is this blowing.

WHY IT MATTERS. Blowing allows him to pass, which is why the other person must compensate him for losing his terumah.

Tosafot – ד"ה היכי אזיל לבית הפרס דרבנן דאמר רב יהודה כו'

OBSERVATION. This implies that blowing permits him to go to testify, but he is still impure, as the Mishnah says he is made impure for his terumah. That is difficult for Rabbeinu Tam, who explains that blowing helps for everything.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Our sugya supports the view that blowing permits walking but does not restore purity for terumah.

ANOTHER VIEW. Rav Yehuda bar Ami citing Rav Yehuda said: a *beit ha-peras* that has been trodden is pure (Rashi: a barley-grain bone could not remain untrodden). Alternatively, other impurities, which a kohen is not warned against (Rashi: such as carcasses and creeping creatures).

5. "As a worker" 29b

BARAITA. "As a worker": as an idle worker. Abaye: as a worker idle from that particular labor.

Rashi – ד"ה כפועל בטל של אותה מלאכה

THE ISSUE. How much is that?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. If his work is easy and well paid, such as drilling pearls, he would accept only slightly less than his wage to stay idle. If it is hard work, such as carpentry, he would gladly take a *zuz* instead of three to stay idle and do easy work. He is paid that amount, not his full wage, since he is not doing hard labor for the other person.

WHY IT MATTERS. Compensation reflects what he would accept to give up his work, not the full wage.

Tosafot – ד"ה כפועל בטל של אותה מלאכה

QUESTION. Rashi should not have explained it as payment for being idle from that labor in order to do easy work like this, for then he would be taking payment for the judging or testifying itself.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot insist the payment is only for idleness, so that it does not become payment for the mitzvah.

6. Mishnah: one suspected about firstborns 29b

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 29b)

החשוד על הבכורות אין לוקחין ממנו בשר צבאים ולא עורות שאינן עבודים. רבי אליעזר אומר לוקחין ממנו עורות של נקבה. ואין לוקחין ממנו צמר מלובן וצואי, אבל לוקחין ממנו טוי ובגדים.

From one suspected about firstborns (Rashi: e.g., of blemishing them deliberately), one may not buy deer meat or untanned hides. R. Eliezer says: one may buy female hides from him. One may not buy washed or soiled wool from him, but one may buy spun wool and garments.

DEER MEAT. It can be confused with calf meat (Rashi: deer meat is red; he might sell an unblemished firstborn calf and call it deer).

HIDES. Not untanned hides; tanned ones we buy, since if it were from a firstborn he would not bother with it, thinking: if the Sages hear of it, they will make me lose it (Rashi: an unblemished firstborn must be buried, and he would not risk his effort).

R. ELIEZER: FEMALE HIDES. Why? It is recognizable (Rashi: a male hide is distinguishable from a female one). And the first Tanna? If so, with a male too, he would cut away the male organ and say "mice ate it" (Rashi: he would cut it to look female). And the other? Mice bites are recognizable.

WOOL. If we do not buy washed wool, need it say soiled wool? Rather it is one thing: wool washed of its dirt. (Rashi: washing is little effort, so he would not mind losing it.)

SPUN WOOL AND GARMENTS. If we buy spun wool, need it say garments? What are "garments"? Felt (Rashi: never spun, so it needed saying).

7. Mishnah: one suspected about the Sabbatical year 29b

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 29b)

החשוד על השביעית אין לוקחין ממנו פשתן ואפילו סרק, אבל לוקחין מהם טוי ואריג.

From one suspected about the Sabbatical year (Rashi: of planting or trading in aftergrowth), one may not buy flax, even combed, but one may buy spun and woven flax.

QUESTION. If we buy spun flax, need it say woven? What is "woven"? Cords (Rashi: braided from flax before it is spun).

8. Mishnah: one suspected of selling terumah 29b–30a

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 29b)

החשוד להיות מוכר תרומה לשום חולין, אין לוקחין ממנו אפילו מים ומלח, דברי רבי יהודה. רבי שמעון אומר כל שיש בו זיקת תרומה ומעשרות אין לוקחין ממנו.

From one suspected of selling terumah as ordinary produce, one may not buy even water and salt (Rashi: as a penalty), says R. Yehuda. R. Shimon says: whatever has a connection to terumah and tithes (Rashi: anything from which terumah is given), one may not buy from him.

WHAT DOES R. SHIMON ADD? Fish innards, which are mixed with olive oil.

THE BUTCHER. A butcher was suspected of selling forbidden kidney fat (Rashi: the fat on the kidneys by the thigh) as permitted fat. Rava penalized him by forbidding him to sell even nuts. Rav Pappa asked Rava: whom does this follow? R. Yehuda? Then even water and salt!

ANSWER. It follows R. Shimon, and we penalize him in the very thing of his sin. Children love nuts; he would go and lure the butchers' children with nuts, and they would bring him the kidney fat, and he would sell it as permitted fat.

Rashi – ד"ה ומשבש לבני טבחים · ד"ה לעולם כרבי שמעון

THE ISSUE. How do nuts fit R. Shimon's narrower rule?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. R. Shimon penalizes only things resembling the prohibited item, and also the very means by which he commits the sin, which here are the nuts. He lured the butchers' children with nuts, hired them to steal the fat from their fathers, and sold it as permitted fat.

WHY IT MATTERS. The penalty fits R. Shimon because it targets the tool of the offense.

Tosafot – ד"ה תרבא דאטמא במר דכנתא

CLARIFICATION. Rabbeinu Tam reads *be-mar de-kanta* as "in exchange for" permitted fat, as in "in exchange for slaughtered meat" (Chullin 94a) and "in exchange for iron" (Bava Kamma 113b).

WHY THIS MATTERS. The phrase describes passing off forbidden fat as permitted fat.

The next Mishnah, on how suspicion in one area relates to others, begins on 30a and is covered in the summary of Bekhorot 30.

The full picture in plain language

The first Mishnah teaches that religious functions must be free: payment voids a judgment, testimony or the purification ritual, following Moshe's example of teaching for free. What may be paid is compensation for real losses: labor around the mitzvah, such as carrying ashes or

drawing water; the cost of food when a kohen loses his terumah; a donkey for an old man; and an idle worker's wage. The Gemara explains how a kohen can pass through a field with a crushed grave and how such compensation is measured.

The next three Mishnayot ask what may be bought from someone suspected of a particular sin. The guiding idea is practical psychology: the suspect would not invest much effort in an item he might lose if the Sages discovered its source, so processed goods are safe while raw ones are not. For the terumah seller, R. Yehuda and R. Shimon differ on how broad the penalty is, and Rava's ban on a fat thief selling nuts follows R. Shimon, since the nuts were the very means of his sin.

Glossary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
דיניו בטילים	*dinav betelim*	"His judgments are void": the result of a judge taking payment.
להזות ולקדש	*lehazot u-lekadesh*	To sprinkle purification water and to mix the red heifer's ashes into it.
מי מערה, אפר מקלה	*mei me'arah, efer miklah*	Plain cave water and ordinary ashes: invalid for purification.
מי חטאת	*mei chatat*	Purification water mixed with the red heifer's ashes.
בית הפרס	*beit ha-peras*	A field where a grave was plowed, rabbinically impure.
פועל בטל	*po'el batel*	An idle worker; compensation measured by what he would accept to stop working.
חשוד	*chashud*	One suspected of violating a particular law.
עורות עבודים	*orot avudim*	Tanned hides, safe to buy since the suspect would not invest effort in a forbidden hide.
צמר מלובן	*tzemer meluban*	Washed wool; little effort, so not proof against suspicion.
שביעית	*shevi'it*	The Sabbatical year, when trading in aftergrowth is forbidden.
זיקת תרומה	*zikat terumah*	A connection to terumah: anything from which terumah is given.
תרבא דאטמא	*tarba de-atma*	The forbidden kidney fat near the thigh.
אמגוזי	*amgozei*	Nuts, used by the butcher to lure children into stealing fat.

Sources: Gemara with relevant Rashi and Tosafot.