Bekhorot 51

Daf Yomi · Sunday, November 8, 2026 · כ״ח חשון תשפ״ז · Covers 51a (Mishnah on the means of redemption) through 52a (R. Abba on the ketubah)

Summary

Bekhorot 51 asks what a father may use to redeem his firstborn son. The Mishnah rules that the five *sela'im* may not be paid with slaves, promissory notes, land or consecrated property. A father who writes the kohen a note for five *sela'im* owes him the money, but his son is not yet redeemed; the kohen may, if he wishes, return the payment as a gift. And one who set aside the redemption money and lost it remains responsible for it, since the Torah says "but you shall surely redeem."

The Gemara shows that the Mishnah does not follow Rebbi, who permits redemption with anything except notes. The disagreement is about method. Rebbi reads the verse as "inclusion, exclusion, inclusion," which includes everything except the one excluded item. The Sages read it as "general, specific, general," which includes only things like the specific: movable objects that are money in themselves. That rules out land, slaves (compared to land) and notes (movable but worth nothing in themselves). Since Rebbi elsewhere uses the "general and specific" method, the Gemara explains that here he follows the school of R. Yishmael: when two general terms stand side by side, the method is "inclusion and exclusion." The Sages follow the Western rule of placing the specific between them. The Mishnah's "nor consecrated property" is reread to teach the reverse: consecrated property itself is not redeemed with any of these things.

Ulla explains that a note would redeem the son by Torah law, but the Sages decreed against it lest people think redemption may be done with documents. Rav Nachman rules against a baraita in the name of R. Yosi b. R. Yehuda that "the son is redeemed when he pays." Kohanim such as R. Tarfon would accept the money and return it, which the Sages approved. R. Chanina, however, refused a father who hovered around him expecting it back. Reish Lakish and Rav Dimi derive the father's responsibility for lost redemption money and his heirs' obligation from valuations and from the pilgrimage offering, though Rav Pappa notes that the Mishnah already supplies a verse. The daf ends with a new Mishnah: a firstborn takes a double share only of his father's estate, and not of increases in value after the death or of property that was only expected. The Gemara gives the verses, and R. Abba calls the parallel rule for a widow's *ketubah* "a leniency of the *ketubah*."

Detailed Summary

1. Mishnah: what may not be used to redeem 51a

Background: the first lines of 51a complete the Gemara on the Mishnah about the five *sela'im* and the Tyrian standard (summary of Bekhorot 50). That Mishnah allowed payment "in silver or its equivalent." The new Mishnah sets limits on the "equivalent."

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 51a)

אין פודין לא בעבדים ולא בשטרות ולא בקרקעות ולא בהקדשות. כתב לכהן שהוא חייב ליתן חמשה סלעים, חייב ליתן לו ובנו אינו פדוי. לפיכך אם רצה הכהן ליתן לו במתנה רשאי. המפריש פדיון בנו ואבד, חייב באחריותו, שנאמר יהיה לך ופדה תפדה.

One may not redeem (a firstborn son) with slaves, with notes (Rashi: e.g., giving the kohen a note on someone else's debt of five *sela'im*), with land, or with consecrated property. If he wrote the kohen that he owes five *sela'im*, he must pay him, and his son is not redeemed. Therefore (since he must pay), if the kohen wishes to give it back to him as a gift, he may. One who set aside his son's redemption and it was lost remains responsible for it, as it says, "it shall be yours, but you shall surely redeem" (Bamidbar 18:15; Rashi: the son is redeemed only once the kohen actually has the payment).

Rashi – ד"ה לפיכך

THE ISSUE. What does "therefore" add?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. Since he must pay the five *sela'im*, the only way to spare him is for the kohen to receive them and give them back as a gift; there is no other remedy.

WHY IT MATTERS. The kohen cannot simply waive the debt; the money must actually change hands.

2. Rebbi versus the Sages: two methods of reading the verse 51a

ATTRIBUTION. The Mishnah does not follow Rebbi, as a baraita teaches: Rebbi says, one may redeem a human firstborn with anything except notes.

REBBI'S REASON. He expounds "inclusions and exclusions" (*ribbuy u-mi'ut*). "And its redemption, from a month old you shall redeem" includes; "by your valuation, silver, five shekels" excludes (Rashi: silver and nothing else); "you shall redeem" includes again. Inclusion, exclusion and inclusion includes everything. What does it include? Everything. What does it exclude? Notes (Rashi: which are not considered anything).

THE SAGES' REASON. They expound "general and specific" (*klal u-ferat*). "And its redemption, from a month old" is a general term; "by your valuation, silver, five shekels" is a specific; "you shall redeem" is again a general term. With general, specific, general, one includes only what

resembles the specific. The specific is explicitly something movable that is money in itself; so too anything movable that is money in itself. This excludes land, which is not movable; slaves, which are compared to land (Rashi: "and you shall bequeath them," Vayikra 25:46); and notes, which, although movable, are not money in themselves.

Rashi – ד"ה תפדה חזר וכלל

THE ISSUE. "You shall redeem" appears in the verse before the specific, not after it. How can it be the closing general term?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. Even so, it is treated as general-specific-general, as the Gemara explains below.

WHY IT MATTERS. The order of the words in the verse is exactly what the next exchange is about.

RAVINA'S CHALLENGE. Ravina to Mareimar: does Rebbi expound inclusions and exclusions? With the awl he expounds general and specific! A baraita (on Devarim 15:17): "an awl": I know only an awl; from where to include a thorn, a needle, a drill and a stylus? The verse says "and you shall take": anything taken by hand, says R. Yosi b. R. Yehuda. Rebbi says: "an awl": just as an awl is metal, so anything of metal. And we said (Kiddushin 21b): Rebbi expounds general and specific; R. Yosi b. R. Yehuda, inclusion and exclusion.

ANSWER. Generally, Rebbi does expound general and specific; here he follows the school of R. Yishmael, which taught: "in the water, in the water" twice: this is not general and specific, but inclusion and exclusion.

Rashi – ד"ה הכא

THE ISSUE. What is the rule of the school of R. Yishmael?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. Wherever two general terms stand next to each other and a specific follows them, it is not read as general and specific. The example (Chullin 67a): "this you may eat of all that is in the water, that has fins and scales, in the water," two general terms, followed by "in the seas and in the rivers," a specific. That is not read as general and specific; the specific is "placed between" the general terms and the passage is read as inclusion and exclusion. Here too, "and its redemption, from a month old" and "you shall redeem" are two adjacent general terms, with the specific after them, so they are read as inclusion and exclusion.

WHY IT MATTERS. It explains why Rebbi, who normally uses the other method, uses this one here: the structure of the verse dictates the method.

THE SAGES. They hold as they say in the West: wherever you find two general terms next to each other, place the specific between them and read them as general and specific.

3. "Nor with consecrated property" 51a–51b

QUESTION. Is that not obvious? Consecrated property is not his! **ANSWER.** Read: "nor is consecrated property (redeemed) with any of these." Rashi: consecrated property may not be redeemed with slaves, notes or land, as derived from verses in Torat Kohanim on the valuations passage.

Tosafot – ד"ה אימא ולא הקדשות בכל אלו

QUESTION. In Pesachim 35b and Bava Metzia 54a, the law that consecrated property cannot be redeemed with land is linked to "he shall give the silver and it shall be his" (Vayikra 27:19), which suggests that this is the source.

ANSWER. That cannot be the actual source; Torat Kohanim derives it from "every valuation shall be by the sacred shekel" (Vayikra 27:25), as Rashi explains there. Those passages simply cite one of the verses that mention silver for consecrated property, and the Gemara often does not quote the main source in every place.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot identify the true derivation behind the Gemara's reinterpretation.

4. A note to the kohen: Ulla and Rav Nachman 51b

ULLA. By Torah law his son is redeemed. Why is he not redeemed? A decree, lest people say one may redeem with a note (Rashi: even with nothing given, or with a note on someone else's debt).

A BARAITA AND RAV NACHMAN. A Tanna recited before Rav Nachman: "his son is redeemed when he pays." Rav Nachman said: this is the anonymous view of R. Yosi b. R. Yehuda (some say, of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon); but the Sages say his son is not redeemed, and the halacha is that his son is not redeemed.

Tosafot – ד"ה אבל חכמים אומרים אין בנו פדוי

QUESTION. Our Mishnah already says "he must pay him, and his son is not redeemed." What does the Sages' view add?

ANSWER. One can say that the Sages mean the son is not redeemed until the father actually pays. The Mishnah teaches that even if the debt was turned into a loan, it is not considered as though the kohen received the money and lent it back; and if the kohen forgave the debt, the son is not redeemed until the father pays.

WHY THIS MATTERS. On this reading, no legal device short of actual payment completes the redemption.

5. Taking and returning: R. Tarfon and R. Chanina 51b

BARAITA. The Mishnah's "the kohen may return it as a gift" supports a baraita: if he gave it to ten kohanim at once, he has fulfilled his obligation (Rashi: he placed five *sela'im* before them all and left); to one after another, he has fulfilled; if the kohen took it and gave it back, he has fulfilled.

R. TARFON. R. Tarfon (Rashi: a kohen) used to take the money and return it. When the Sages heard, they said: "He has fulfilled this halacha." Only this and nothing more? Rather: "he has fulfilled also this halacha."

R. CHANINA. R. Chanina (Rashi: a kohen) used to take and return. He saw a man who kept walking back and forth in front of him (Rashi: so as to be noticed and get his money back). He said to him: "You did not give wholeheartedly; you did a bad thing. Therefore your son is not redeemed."

Rashi – ד"ה מידעם ביש עבדת · ד"ה א"ל לא גמרת ונתת

THE ISSUE. Why does R. Chanina withhold the redemption?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. The father did not make a complete gift; he gave only so that the kohen would return it. Therefore, if the kohen returns it, the son is not redeemed. In another version: even if the kohen does not return it, the son is not redeemed.

WHY IT MATTERS. The kohen's generosity is permitted, but the father's payment must be a real gift, not a formality.

Tosafot – ד"ה הלכך אין בנו פדוי

QUESTION. Kiddushin 6b rules that a gift "on condition that it be returned" is valid, and the son is redeemed. Why is this case different?

ANSWER. R. Chanina was willing to accept only a complete gift, since otherwise it would look like a kohen helping at the threshing floors to receive gifts, which is forbidden (26b, "they corrupted the covenant of the Levi"). And although the father gave without stating a condition, his behavior made it clear that he expected the money back, so it was not merely an unspoken intention.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot reconcile R. Chanina with Kiddushin by adding a concern about the dignity of the priesthood, and by treating the father's conduct as evidence of his intent.

6. Responsibility for lost redemption money 51b

QUESTION. One who set aside his son's redemption and it was lost is responsible: from where do we know?

REISH LAKISH. From "valuation ... valuation": redemption is written "by your valuation" (Bamidbar 18:16), and valuations remain the vower's responsibility.

Rashi – ד"ה אתיא ערך ערך

THE ISSUE. How do valuations show this?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. Money for valuations remains the owner's responsibility until it reaches the Temple treasurer, as derived in Chullin 139a from "he shall give the valuation on that day": it is still unconsecrated in your hand until it reaches the treasurer. The redemption money, compared by the shared word "valuation," is likewise his responsibility until it reaches the kohen.

WHY IT MATTERS. Setting money aside does not discharge the obligation; only delivery does.

RAV DIMI CITING R. YONATAN. "Every firstborn of your sons you shall redeem, and they shall not appear before Me empty-handed" (Shemot 34:20): learn "empty ... empty" from the pilgrimage burnt offering. Just as the owner bears responsibility for the pilgrimage offering, so for the redemption of a son.

Rashi – ד"ה מה עולת ראייה חייב באחריותה

THE ISSUE. Why must the analogy be to the pilgrimage offering, and why is the verse about redemption not enough by itself?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. The pilgrimage offering is an obligation, no less than a vow, so if the animal dies or is stolen, the owner must replace it; it is as though he carries it on his shoulder. And if it is lost and he does not replace it, he will appear "empty" in the courtyard. The redemption verse's "they shall not appear empty" does not itself mean appearing before God in the Temple, since the redemption is paid to a kohen, not brought to the Temple. One might therefore have thought that setting the money aside suffices.

WHY IT MATTERS. Rashi explains why the analogy is needed.

RAV PAPPA'S OBJECTION. A verse for a verse? (Rashi: the Mishnah already cites a different verse.) Rather, the reason is as the Mishnah teaches: "it shall be yours, but you shall surely redeem."

REAPPLICATION. Reish Lakish's teaching was actually said on the earlier Mishnah: if the son died after thirty days, the father must pay even if he had not done so. From where? Reish Lakish: "valuation ... valuation" from valuations (Rashi: one who says "my valuation is upon me" and dies, his heirs must pay). Rav Dimi citing R. Yonatan: "every firstborn of your sons you shall redeem, and they shall not appear before Me empty-handed": just as there the heirs are liable, so here the heirs are liable.

Rashi – ד"ה אף כאן יורשין חייבים

THE ISSUE. When are the heirs liable?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. After the death of the father and the son, both of whom had been obligated. Just as the pilgrimage offering is an obligatory offering that the heirs must bring (as a woman's heirs bring her burnt offering if she dies after bringing her sin offering), so once the son lived thirty days and the father became obligated, the obligation passes to the heirs.

WHY IT MATTERS. The redemption is a debt that survives the father, not merely a personal duty that lapses at death.

7. Mishnah: what the firstborn's double share covers 51b–52a

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 51b–52a)

הבכור נוטל פי שנים בנכסי האב, ואינו נוטל פי שנים בנכסי האם, ואינו נוטל בשבח ולא בראוי כבמוחזק, ולא האשה בכתובתה ולא הבנות במזונותיהן ולא את היבם, וכולם אין נוטלין בשבח ולא בראוי כבמוחזק.

The firstborn takes a double portion of his father's estate but not of his mother's (Rashi: her *melog* property). He does not take a double portion of the increase in value (*shevach*), nor of property that was only "expected" (*ra'uy*) as of property that was in his father's possession (*muchzak*). Likewise a wife collecting her *ketubah*, daughters collecting their support, and the levir (who inherits his brother's share): none of these take from the increase or from expected property as from property already possessed.

Rashi – ד"ה בראוי · ד"ה בשבח

THE ISSUE. What do "increase" and "expected" mean in practice?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. If the property increased in value after the father died and before the brothers divided it, the firstborn does not take a double share of the increase. The property is valued as of the father's death; if the firstborn takes his double share in land, he pays the others for the increase on his second portion, and that money is divided among all of them. "Expected" property is property the father did not hold at his death but which was due to fall to him by inheritance and did so later; the firstborn does not take a double share of it.

WHY IT MATTERS. The double portion is fixed by what the father actually owned at the moment of death.

NOT THE MOTHER'S PROPERTY. Why? The verse says, "for he is the first of his strength; *his* is the law of the firstborn" (Devarim 21:17): the law of the firstborn applies to a man's estate, not to a woman's (Rashi: "his" refers to the father's own property).

INCREASE AND EXPECTED PROPERTY. It says, "of all that is found to him" (Devarim 21:17): to the father, at the time of his death (Rashi).

THE KETUBAH. But Shmuel said a creditor collects even the increase (Rashi: if the borrower sold land and the buyers improved it, the creditor seizes both the land and its improvement, and a widow is also a creditor)! **R. ABBA.** מקולי כתובה שנו כאן: "this is one of the leniencies of the *ketubah*."

The Gemara's explanation of the rest of this Mishnah, on daughters' support and the levir, continues on 52a and is covered in the summary of Bekhorot 52.

The full picture in plain language

The daf sets the practical terms of redeeming a firstborn son. Payment must be in movable things of intrinsic value: not land, not slaves, not notes. The Sages and Rebbi reach different lists because they read the same verse by different methods, and the Gemara traces that choice to the verse's structure, two general terms side by side. A note to the kohen creates a debt but does not redeem the son, by rabbinic decree. The kohen may return the money, as R. Tarfon did, but only if it was truly given, as R. Chanina insisted. The obligation stays with the father, and after him with his heirs, until the kohen is paid.

The closing Mishnah turns from redemption to inheritance. The firstborn's double share covers only what his father actually owned when he died: not his mother's property, not later increases, and not property that only fell in afterward. The same limit applies to a widow's *ketubah*, which R. Abba explains as one of the *ketubah*'s special leniencies.

Glossary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
שטרות	*shetarot*	Promissory notes. They cannot be used to redeem a firstborn, since they are not money in themselves.
קרקעות	*karka'ot*	Land; excluded because it is not movable.
עבדים	*avadim*	Slaves; legally compared to land and so excluded.
הקדשות	*hekdeshot*	Consecrated property, which cannot itself be redeemed with land, slaves or notes.
ריבויי ומיעוטי	*ribbuyei u-mi'utei*	"Inclusions and exclusions": a reading method that includes everything except what is explicitly excluded.
כללי ופרטי	*kelalei u-feratei*	"Generals and specifics": a reading method that includes only what resembles the specific.
גופו ממון	*gufo mamon*	Money in itself: something with intrinsic value, unlike a note.
מרצע	*martze'a*	The awl used to pierce a Hebrew slave's ear, a classic case for the two reading methods.
גזירה	*gezeirah*	A rabbinic decree, here against redemption by note.
מתנה על מנת להחזיר	*matanah al menat lehachazir*	A gift on condition that it be returned; valid in general, but R. Chanina rejected one made without real intent.
אחריות	*acharayut*	Responsibility for loss: the father remains liable until the kohen receives the money.
ערכין	*arakhin*	Valuation vows, whose money remains the vower's responsibility until it reaches the treasurer.

עולת ראייה	*olat re'iyah*	The pilgrimage burnt offering, a personal obligation that heirs must fulfill.
ריקם	*reikam*	"Empty-handed," the word linking redemption to the pilgrimage offering.
פי שנים	*pi shenayim*	The firstborn's double portion of his father's estate.
שבח	*shevach*	Increase in value of an estate after the death, excluded from the double portion.
ראוי, מוחזק	*ra'uy, muchzak*	Property only expected, versus property actually held at death.
נכסי מלוג	*nikhsei melog*	A wife's own property, managed by her husband; not subject to the double portion.
כתובה	*ketubah*	The widow's marriage settlement, collected without increases.

Sources: Gemara with relevant Rashi and Tosafot.