Bekhorot 54

Daf Yomi · Wednesday, November 11, 2026 · א׳ כסלו תשפ״ז · Covers 54b (Mishnah on grazing distance) through 55b (Shmuel on rivers)

Summary

Bekhorot 54 asks when animals in different places join to make up the ten needed for the animal tithe. The Mishnah answers: within "the stride of a grazing animal," sixteen *mil*. Animals thirty-two *mil* apart do not join unless some are in the middle, and R. Meir holds that the Jordan divides them. The source is "the flocks shall pass again under the hand of one who counts them" (Yirmeyahu 33:13): animals count together if one shepherd can watch them, and the Sages knew that a shepherd's eye reaches sixteen *mil*.

Rav and Shmuel dispute how many animals must be in the middle to join the two ends. Rav requires five, enough to complete a tithe with either side. Shmuel requires only one, since the shepherd goes there anyway and "counts" it. A baraita about villages around Tzippori seems to refute Rav, until Shmuel himself reinterprets it in Rav's favor. Rav Pappa adds that for Shmuel even the shepherd's home or tools in the middle would join them; Rav Ashi's question about the shepherd's dog is left unresolved.

On R. Meir's view of the Jordan, R. Ami says a bridge removes the division, but a baraita shows that the Land of Israel and lands outside it never join, even where no river separates them. R. Chiya bar Abba explains instead that the Torah made the Jordan a border of its own, and the Gemara explains why the tribal borders are different. The Gemara asks whether the Jordan's status is a Tannaitic dispute, rules that "the Jordan" means only the river south of Jericho, and traces its source to the cave of Pamyas, "descending from Dan." It ends with the sources of other things: the root of blood is the liver, and the root of all water is the Euphrates, with R. Meir saying the river's true name is Yuval. Rav and Shmuel disagree over whether rivers swell from rain or from their own sources, which Shmuel's father took into account when he arranged immersions for his daughters.

Detailed Summary

1. Mishnah: how far apart may animals be? 54b

Background: the animal tithe applies only once there are at least ten animals of the same year and kind. The first lines of 54b complete the Gemara on the chapter's opening Mishnah (summary of Bekhorot 53). The new Mishnah asks whether animals kept in different places count together.

MISHNAH (BEKHOROT 54b)

מעשר בהמה מצטרף כמלא רגל בהמה רועה. וכמה היא רגל בהמה רועה? ט"ז מיל. היו בין אלו לאלו ל"ב מיל, אין מצטרפין. היו לו באמצע, מביא ומעשרן באמצע. ר"מ אומר הירדן מפסיק למעשר בהמה.

Animals join for the tithe within the full stride of a grazing animal. How far is the stride of a grazing animal? Sixteen *mil*. If there were thirty-two *mil* between these and those, they do not join. If he had animals in the middle, he brings them and tithes them in the middle (Rashi: the middle animals join the two sides; "brings" is not meant literally). R. Meir says: the Jordan separates for the animal tithe (Rashi: five on each side with the Jordan between them do not join, and they are exempt).

Rashi – ד"ה מתני' מצטרף כמלא רגל בהמה רועה

THE ISSUE. What does "the stride of a grazing animal" measure?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. The distance a grazing animal wanders, which is sixteen *mil*. Alternatively, the distance between animals that one shepherd can still watch, as the Gemara explains. If one has five animals in one village and five in another sixteen *mil* away, he brings them into one pen and tithes them; if farther apart, they are exempt.

WHY IT MATTERS. The measure is practical: a single flock is one that one shepherd can manage.

SOURCE. From where? Rabbah bar Shila: "the flocks shall again pass under the hand of one who counts them" (Yirmeyahu 33:13). Rashi: if they can be counted by one shepherd, they are called a "flock" and pass under the rod to be tithed. The Sages knew that a shepherd's eye reaches sixteen *mil*.

QUESTION. "Thirty-two *mil* do not join": this implies that less than that does join, but the Mishnah said sixteen *mil* and no more! **ANSWER.** It says thirty-two because it wants to teach the next clause: if he had animals in the middle (sixteen from each side), he tithes them together.

2. How many in the middle? Rav and Shmuel 54b–55a

RAV. Five on each side and five in the middle, since those five are fit to join this side or that side.

SHMUEL. Even five on each side and one in the middle. We view the shepherd as though he stands there, and apply to him "one who counts."

Rashi – ד"ה ה' מכאן וה' מכאן ואחת באמצע · ד"ה דהנך ה'

THE ISSUE. What is the reasoning behind each view?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. For Rav, the middle animals must be enough to make a tithe with either side: five in the middle plus five on either side makes ten. If there were five on one side, four on the other and five in the middle, the four do not join. For Shmuel, even a single animal in the middle, though it does not complete a count, joins the sides, since the shepherd normally goes there to bring it, as if he stands there and is "one who counts."

WHY IT MATTERS. Rav measures by the arithmetic of the tithe; Shmuel, by the shepherd's actual movements.

CHALLENGE TO RAV. A baraita: if he had five in Kfar Chananyah and five in Kfar Otnai, they do not join unless he has one in Tzippori. This is a refutation of Rav! (Rashi: Kfar Otnai and Kfar Chananyah are thirty-two *mil* apart, with Tzippori in the middle.)

ANSWER. Shmuel explained it according to Rav: the case is nine on each side and one in the middle, since that one is fit to join either side (making ten). Rashi: "one in the middle" does not refer to the first case, of five.

RAV PAPPA. According to Shmuel, even the shepherd himself joins them (Rashi: if he lives in the middle, though he has no animal there), and even the shepherd's tools join them (Rashi: since he will eventually go there to fetch them).

RAV ASHI'S QUESTION. What about the shepherd's dog? Since he calls it and it comes, they do not join; or perhaps sometimes it does not come, and he must go and bring it. **UNRESOLVED.** תיקו, the question stands.

3. R. Meir: the Jordan divides 55a

R. AMI. This applies only where there is no bridge; where there is a bridge, the bridge joins them. This implies that the reason is that they cannot reach each other (Rashi: neither the animals nor the shepherd).

CHALLENGE. A baraita: if he had animals on both sides of the Jordan, or in two provinces such as Namer and Namurei (Rashi: two neighboring districts of one kingdom), they do not join; needless to say, outside the Land and in the Land. But outside the Land and the Land are like a place with a bridge (Rashi: there is no river between them at all), and still they do not join!

R. CHIYA BAR ABBA CITING R. YOCHANAN. Rather, this is R. Meir's reason: "and the Jordan shall border it on the east side" (Yehoshua 18:20): the Torah made it a border of its own.

Tosafot – ד"ה אמר קרא יגבול אותו לפאת קדמה

NOTE. This verse is written in the book of Yehoshua regarding the border of Binyamin, not as some texts have it.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot correct the reference.

QUESTION. If so, "and the border turned and went up" (Yehoshua 18:14), written of the tribal borders, should also make each tribe's border a separate boundary! (Rashi: then animals in two tribes' territories would not join even within sixteen *mil*, and why mention "outside the Land and the Land"?) **ANSWER.** There it is different, for it says "this shall be your land with its borders all around" (Bamidbar 34:12): the whole Land of Israel is one border.

Tosafot – ד"ה שאני התם דאמר קרא זאת תהיה לכם הארץ לגבולותיה סביב

QUESTION. Rashi explains that after counting the tribal borders, the verse made the Land one, implying both are written together.

ANSWER. They are not. "This shall be your land" is in the portion of Masei, in the Torah, while the tribal borders are in the book of Yehoshua. The Torah verse teaches that all of the Land's borders are one.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The Torah's statement about the whole Land overrides the later description of tribal borders.

QUESTION. If so, the Jordan too! **ANSWER.** "The land," and not the Jordan (Rashi: the verse counts the Land's borders as one, not the borders formed by the Jordan).

SUPPORT. This fits R. Chiya bar Abba, which is why the Mishnah mentions the Jordan. But according to R. Ami, it should have mentioned all rivers! **CONCLUSION.** This is a difficulty for R. Ami.

4. Is the Jordan part of Canaan? 55a

SUGGESTION. Shall we say this is a Tannaitic dispute? "When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan" (Bamidbar 33:51): the land of Canaan, not the Jordan, says R. Yehuda ben Beteira. R. Shimon ben Yochai says: it says "beyond the Jordan of Jericho, eastward" (Bamidbar 34:15): just as Jericho is the land of Canaan, so is the Jordan.

Tosafot – ד"ה מעבר לירדן ירחו קדמה מזרחה כתיב מה יריחו ארץ כו'

QUESTION. The Jordan is juxtaposed to Jericho in many places. Why cite this verse?

ANSWER. This verse comes in Masei after the borders of the Land are listed, where Moshe says that two and a half tribes took their inheritance "beyond the Jordan of Jericho, eastward." This implies the Jordan belongs to the Land of Israel proper, not to the territory of the two and a half tribes, just as Jericho does not.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The verse's context shows the Jordan is part of the Land itself.

RABBAH BAR BAR CHANA CITING R. YOCHANAN. אין ירדן אלא מבית ירחו ולמטה: "The Jordan is only from Beit Jericho and southward." For what law? For vows, follow common speech: wherever people call it the Jordan, it is forbidden. So it is for the animal tithe. A baraita agrees: the Jordan comes out of the cave of Pamyas, passes through the lake of Sivkhi, the lake of Tiberias and the lake of Sodom, and goes on to fall into the Great Sea; and the Jordan is only from Beit Jericho southward.

Tosafot – ד"ה אין ירדן אלא מבית ירחו ולמטה

QUESTION. Rashi explains that north of Jericho it loses its significance because it mixes with large lakes. But below Jericho it has already mixed with those lakes!

ANSWER. Even after mixing, the river can emerge from the lakes and flow on distinctly, as the baraita describes it passing through the lakes and then falling into the Great Sea; it is recognizable when it emerges.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The definition of "the Jordan" depends on where it flows as a distinct river.

THE NAME. R. Chiya bar Abba citing R. Yochanan: why is it called *Yarden*? Because it "descends from Dan" (*yored mi-Dan*). R. Abba told Rav Ashi: you there (in Babylonia) learn it from the name; we here learn it from "they called it Leshem Dan, after the name of Dan their father" (Shoftim 18:29), and R. Yitzchak said Leshem is Pamyas, and a baraita says the Jordan comes from the cave of Pamyas.

5. The "roots" of things: the Jordan, blood and water 55a–55b

RAV KAHANA. The source of the Jordan is the cave of Pamyas. One who says "I will not drink water from the cave of Pamyas" is forbidden the whole Jordan.

BLOOD. The source of blood is the liver, as R. Yitzchak said: a liver that dissolved imparts impurity with a quarter-*log* (Rashi: in a tent, as the blood of a corpse).

WATER. The source of water is the Euphrates, as Rav Yehuda citing Rav said: one who vows off the waters of the Euphrates is forbidden all the waters of the world. How so? If he said "I will not drink from the waters of the Euphrates," he may drink from another river (Rashi: one follows common speech). Rather, he said "I will not drink water that comes from the Euphrates," for Rav said all rivers are below three rivers, and the three rivers are below the Euphrates (Rashi: the Chidekel, Pishon and Gichon).

QUESTION. What about springs that rise up high? Rav Mesharshya: those are the "ladders" of the Euphrates (Rashi: flowing underground and rising into the mountains like a ladder).

QUESTION. But it says "the fourth river is the Euphrates" (Bereishit 2:14), as one of four! Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak (or Rav Acha bar Yaakov): "it is the Euphrates" from the beginning.

Tosafot – ד"ה הוא פרת דמעיקרא

CLARIFICATION. It is not called "fourth" for being small. It is the original Euphrates, which bore that name before the river split into four heads. When it divides, the other rivers branch off to either side, while the Euphrates continues straight on its course. Bereishit Rabbah implies it is larger than the Chidekel.

WHY THIS MATTERS. The verse's numbering does not diminish the Euphrates' role as the source of the other rivers.

R. MEIR. Its name is Yuval, as it says, "like a tree planted by waters, that sends its roots by the stream (*yuval*)" (Yirmeyahu 17:8). Why is it called *Perat*? Because its waters are fruitful and multiply (*parim ve-ravim*; Rashi: it grows without any rain).

SHMUEL AND RAV. This supports Shmuel, who said: a river is blessed from its own source. It disagrees with Rav, as R. Ami citing Rav said: rain in the West (Eretz Yisrael) is witnessed by the Euphrates (Rashi: the Euphrates flows from the Land of Israel to Babylonia, and swells when it rains there).

Tosafot – ד"ה מטרא במערבא סהדא רבה פרת

OBSERVATION. This implies the Euphrates flows from the Land of Israel toward Babylonia, as Tosafot discussed on 44b. It also suggests that the Garden of Eden lies in the west of the world, since Babylonia is northeast of the Land of Israel, and Bava Batra 25b says Babylonia lies to its north.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Rav's statement is used to reconstruct the geography assumed by the Sages.

6. Shmuel's father and his daughters' immersion 55b

THE PRACTICE. Shmuel's father made his daughters a *mikveh* in the days of Nisan, and mats in the days of Tishrei.

NISAN. He held as Rav did, that rain in the West is witnessed by the Euphrates; perhaps the dripping water (rain) would exceed the flowing water, so that rainwater would be the majority.

Rashi – ד"ה מקוה ביומי ניסן

THE ISSUE. Why could the river not be used in Nisan?

RASHI'S EXPLANATION. He made them a *mikveh* of spring water at home and did not let them immerse in rivers during the rainy season. He feared the rainwater would outweigh the river's own flowing water. Flowing rainwater does not purify, and a *zavah* requires "living water." Others explain that the concern was water that fell on the ground and flowed into the river.

WHY IT MATTERS. Whether a river is spring-fed or rain-fed determines whether it can serve as a *mikveh* while flowing.

TISHREI. And mats in the days of Tishrei. Rashi: when they immersed in the river in Tishrei, he threw reed mats into the water for them to stand on, since in Tishrei the riverbanks have soft mud that might cling to their feet and interpose.

Tosafot – ד"ה ומפצי ביומי תשרי

NOTE. Rashi's explanation, mats against interposing mud, is supported by Niddah 66b, where this story appears beside rulings about mud. Rabbeinu Tam explains the mats as a matter of modesty: the rivers are low in Tishrei, and the mats were spread so that the women would not be seen.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot record two different reasons for the same practice.

SHMUEL CONTRADICTS HIMSELF. Shmuel said: water does not purify while flowing except the Euphrates in the days of Tishrei (Rashi: at the end of the summer, when it has not rained for a long time). This implies that rivers swell from rain, against Shmuel's other statement that a river is blessed from its own source.

Tosafot – ד"ה אין המים מטהרין בזוחלין כו'

RULING. Rabbeinu Tam ruled in a responsum that although Shmuel's father and Rav share one approach, we do not follow it. We follow Shmuel's other statement, that a river is blessed from its own source, which is supported by R. Meir's teaching that the Euphrates' waters multiply on their own.

WHY THIS MATTERS. Tosafot record the practical conclusion: rivers may be used for immersion even in the rainy season.

The next Mishnah, on purchased animals and gifts, begins on 55b and is covered in the summary of Bekhorot 55.

The full picture in plain language

The daf defines a "flock" for the tithe by what one shepherd can watch: sixteen *mil*. Rav and Shmuel disagree on what joins two distant groups: Rav requires enough animals in the middle to complete a tithe with either side, while Shmuel counts anything that brings the shepherd there, even, Rav Pappa adds, his house or his tools. Rav Ashi's question about the dog is left unresolved.

R. Meir's ruling on the Jordan turns out not to be about distance at all: the Jordan is a border of its own, just as the Land of Israel and lands outside it never join, while tribal borders do not divide because the whole Land is one. The Gemara defines "the Jordan" as the river south of Jericho, traces it to Pamyas, and moves on to the "roots" of things: the liver for blood and the Euphrates for water. The daf ends with a practical question of purity: whether rivers rise from rain or from their own springs, which shaped how Shmuel's father arranged his daughters' immersions.

Glossary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning in this sugya
מצטרף	*mitztaref*	Joins: animals in different places counting together toward the tithe.
רגל בהמה רועה	*regel behemah ro'ah*	"The stride of a grazing animal": sixteen *mil*.
מיל	*mil*	A unit of distance, roughly a kilometer.
מונה	*moneh*	"One who counts": the shepherd, from Yirmeyahu 33:13.
תיקו	*teiku*	"Let it stand": a question left unresolved.
גשר	*gesher*	A bridge, which R. Ami says would join animals across a river.
אבטילאות	*avtila'ot*	Provinces or districts, whose animals do not join.
גבול בפני עצמו	*gevul bifnei atzmo*	A border of its own: the Jordan's status for R. Meir.
ארץ כנען	*eretz Kena'an*	The land of Canaan; disputed whether it includes the Jordan.
מערת פמייס	*me'arat Pamyas*	The cave of Pamyas (Banias), source of the Jordan.
נודר	*noder*	One who vows; vows are interpreted by common speech.
זכרותא	*zakhruta*	The "root" or source of something.
רביעית	*revi'it*	A quarter-*log*, the amount of corpse blood that defiles in a tent.
פרת	*Perat*	The Euphrates, source of the world's rivers; R. Meir says its name is Yuval.
מקוה	*mikveh*	A ritual bath of gathered or spring water.
זוחלין, נוטפין	*zochalin, notfin*	Flowing spring water and dripping rainwater; only spring water purifies while flowing.
מפצי	*maftzei*	Reed mats placed in the river for immersion.

Sources: Gemara with relevant Rashi and Tosafot.