

## CBAJ Mishna Club Week 3

Prepared by Rabbi Roy Feldman and Tzvi Goldstein

We are making great progress and learning so much about the mitzvah of establishing the months (the first Mitzvah the Jewish people received upon leaving Egypt). This week, we will learn 5 Mishnayot (one is very short, and the last one is connected with the previous ones).

### משנה ראש השנה א:ט'

מִי שֶׁרָאָה אֶת הַחֹדֶשׁ וְאִינוּ יְכוּלִים לְהֵלֵךְ, מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ עַל הַחֲמוֹר, אֶפְלוּ בַמָּטָה. וְאִם צוּדָה לָהֶם, לוֹקְחִין בְּיָדָם מַקְלוֹת. וְאִם הָיְתָה דְרֶדֶךְ רְחוּקָה, לוֹקְחִין בְּיָדָם מְזוֹנֹנוֹת, שְׁעַל מִהֲלֶךְ לַיְלָה יוֹם מִחֲלָלִין אֶת הַשֶּׁבֶת וְיוֹצְאִין לְעֵדוּת הַחֹדֶשׁ. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ויקרא כג), אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אוֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם:

### Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:9

With regard to **one who saw the new moon but is unable to go** to Jerusalem by foot because he is sick or has difficulty walking, others **may bring him on a donkey or even in a bed**, even on Shabbat if necessary. **And if** the witnesses are concerned that bandits may be **lying in wait for them** along the road, **they may take clubs** or other weapons **in their hands**, even on Shabbat. **And if it was a long journey** to Jerusalem, **they may take sustenance with them**, although it is ordinarily prohibited to carry on Shabbat, **since for** a distance of **a walk of a night and a day**, the witnesses **may desecrate Shabbat and go out to** give **testimony** to determine the start of **the month**. This is as it is stated: **“These are the Festivals of the Lord, sacred gatherings, which you shall declare in their seasons”** (Leviticus 23:4). This teaches that, in all cases, the Festivals must be fixed at their proper times, even if it entails the transgression of Torah prohibitions.

*Which law of Shabbat is being broken in this case?*

*What is so important about the Mitzva of sanctifying the new moon in its proper time, that justifies breaking Shabbat?*

## משנה ראש השנה ב:א

אם אינן מכירין אותו, משלחין אחר עמו להעידו. בראשונה היו מקבלין עדות החדש מכל אדם. משקלקלו המינין, התקינו שלא יהו מקבלין אלא מן המכירים:

### Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:1

If the members of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem **are not familiar with that** one who saw the new moon, i.e., that he is a valid witness, the members of his local court of twenty-three **send another with him to testify** about him. The mishna adds: **Initially**, the court **would accept testimony** to determine the start **of the month from any person**, as all are presumed to be qualified witnesses, absent any disqualifying factors. However, **when the Boethusians**, a sect whose members had their own opinions with regard to the establishment of the Festivals, **corrupted** the process by sending false witnesses to testify about the new moon, the Sages **instituted that they would accept** this testimony **only from those men familiar** to the Sanhedrin as valid witnesses.

*What motivated the decision to require validating the witnesses as trustworthy members of the community?*

*Would you accept testimony about the new moon from a witness who cheats on his taxes? What about someone who occasionally breaks Shabbat for business purposes?*

## משנה ראש השנה ב:ב

בראשונה היו משיאין משואות. משקלקלו הכותים, התקינו שיהו שלוחין יוצאין:

### Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:2

**Initially**, after the court sanctified the new month **they would light torches** on the mountaintops, from one peak to another, to signal to the community in Babylonia that the month had been sanctified. **After the Samaritans [Kutim] corrupted** and ruined this method by lighting torches at the wrong times to confuse the Jews, the Sages **instituted that messengers should go out** to the Diaspora and inform them of the start of the month.

*What were the benefits of the original method of spreading the word about the new month? What were the benefits of sending messengers?*

## משנה ראש השנה ב:ג

פיצד היו משיאין משואות. מביאין כלנסאות של ארז ארזין וקנים ועצי שמן ונערת של פשתן וכורד במשיחה. ועולה לראש ההר ומצית בהן את האור, ומוליך ומביא ומעלה ומוריד, עד שהוא רואה את חברו שהוא עושה כן בראש ההר השני, וכן בראש ההר השלישי:

### Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:3

The mishna asks: **How would they light the torches** during that earlier period? They would **bring** items that burn well, e.g., **long poles of cedar, reeds, pinewood, and beaten flax**, and tie them together **with a string**. And someone would then **ascend to the top of the mountain and light the torch on fire with them, and wave it back and forth and up and down, until he would see his colleague doing likewise on the top of the second mountain**. In this manner he would know that the next messenger had received the message and passed it on. **And similarly**, the second torchbearer would wait for a signal from the one **on the top of the third mountain**, and so on. In this manner the message would reach the Diaspora.

*Connect this Mishna to Paul Revere's famous line, "One if by land, two if by sea."*

## משנה ראש השנה ב:ד

ומאין היו משיאין משואות, מהר המשחה לסרטבא, ומסרטבא לגרופינא, ומגרופינא לתורן, ומתורן לבית בלתין, ומבית בלתין לא זוו משם, אלא מוליך ומביא ומעלה ומוריד עד שיהיה רואה כל הגולה לפניו כמדורת האש:

### Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:4

**And from which mountains would they light the torches?** They would transmit the message **from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem to Sartava, and from Sartava to Gerofina, and from Gerofina to Havran, and from Havran to Beit Baltin**. And from Beit Baltin they would **not move** to light torches in any other predetermined location. **Rather**, the one who was appointed for this task would **wave the torch back and forth and up and down, until he would see the entire Diaspora before him alight like one large bonfire**, as they would light torches to continue transmitting the message from place to place all the way to the farthest reaches of the Diaspora.

*Compare and contrast the method of using mountaintops and fire described in Mishnayot 3 and 4 with the following:*

### **Catskill Mountain Fire Towers**

The Catskill Mountain fire towers were constructed to facilitate forest fire prevention and control in the Catskill Mountains of New York. 23 towers were built between 1908 and 1950. The towers fell into disuse by the 1970s as fire spotting from airplanes became more effective, and were gradually decommissioned. The Hunter Mountain Fire Tower was the last to be taken out of service in 1990. Most of the towers have been dismantled, but the five remaining towers have been renovated and opened to the public for observation: the aforementioned Hunter Mountain tower, the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Observation Station, Overlook Mountain Tower in Woodstock, Tremper Mountain Fire Tower in the town of Denning and Red Hill Fire Tower in the town of Shandaken. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catskill\\_Mountain\\_fire\\_towers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catskill_Mountain_fire_towers))

