

## Mishna and Renewal

Responding to Absence: An Exploration of Mishnah Taanit Rifka Rosenwein a"h Memorial Lecture Miriam Lichtenberg

א:ז

עָבְרוּ אֵלוּ וְלֹא נַעֲנוּ, מְמַעֲטִין בְּמַשָּׂא וּמַתָּן, בְּבְנְיֶן וּבִנְטִיעָה, בְּאֵרוּסִין וּבְנִשּׂוּאִין וּבִשְׁאֵלַת שָׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ, כָּבְנֵי אָדָם הַנְזוּפִין לַמָּקוֹם. הַיְחִידִים חוֹזְרִים וּמִתְעַנִּים עַד שֶׁיֵּצֵא נִיסָן. יָצָא נִיסָן וְלֹא יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים, סִימַן קָלָלָה, שֶׁנֶאֱמַר (שמואל א יב:יז) הַלוֹא קְצִיר חִטִּים הַיּוֹם, וְגוֹ':

If these fasts have passed and they have not been answered, the community decreases their engagement in business transactions, in building and planting, in betrothals and marriages, and in greetings between each person and his fellow, like people who have been rebuked by God. The Torah scholars resume fasting every Monday and Thursday until the month of Nisan ends. After this date they no longer pray for rain, since if Nisan has ended and rains subsequently fall, they are a sign of a curse, as it is stated: "Is not the wheat harvest today" (Samuel 1 12:17)?

### ב:א

ַסֶדָר תַּעֲנִיּוֹת כֵּיצַד? מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הַתֵּבָה לְרְחוֹבָהּ שֶׁל עִיר, וְנוֹתְנִין אֵפֶר מִקְלֶה עַל גַּבֵּי הַתֵּבָה, וּבְרֹאשׁ הַנָּשִׁיא וּבְרֹאשׁ אַב בֵּית דִּין, וְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נוֹתֵן בְּרֹאשׁו. הַזָּקֵן שֶׁבָּהֶן אוֹמֵר לְפְנֵיהֶן דְּבְרֵי כִבּוּשִׁין, אַחֵינוּ, לֹא נֶאֱמַר בְּאַנְשֵׁי נִינְוָה, וַיַּרְא הָאֱלהִים אֶת שַׁקֶם וְאֶת תַּעֲנִיתָם, אֶלָא (יונה ג) וַיַּרְא הָאֱלהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׁיהֶם, כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדַּרְכָּם הָרָעָה. וּבַקַּבָּלָה הוּא אוֹמֵר (יואל ב) וְקָרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאַל בְּגְדֵיכֶם:

What is the customary order of fast days? Normally the sacred ark in the synagogue was kept in a locked room. However, on fast days they remove the ark to the main city square and place burnt ashes upon the ark, as a sign of mourning. And they also place ashes on the head of the *Nasi*, and on the head of the deputy *Nasi*, and each and every member of the community likewise places ashes upon his head. The eldest member of the community says to the congregation statements of reproof, for example: Our brothers, it is not stated with regard to the people of Nineveh: And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather, the verse says: "And God saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10). And in the Prophets it says: "And rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13).

### ב:ב

עָמְדוּ בִתְפָלֶה, מוֹרִידִין לְפְנֵי הַתֵּבָה זָקֵן וְרָגִיל, וְיֶשׁ לוֹ בָנִים, וּבֵיתוֹ רֵיקָם, כְּדֵי שֶׁיְהֵא לְבּוֹ שָׁלֵם בַּתְּפִלָּה, וְאוֹמֵר לְפְנֵיהֶם עֵשְׁרִים וְאַרְבַּע בְּרַכוֹת, שְׁמֹנֵה עֵשְׁרֵה שֵׁבְּכָל יוֹם, וּמוֹסִיף עֲלֵיהֵן עוֹד שֵׁשׁ:

They stand for prayer. The congregation appoints an elder, who is experienced in leading prayer, to descend before the ark as communal prayer leader. And this prayer leader must have children and must be poor, so that her heart will be fully concentrated on the prayer for the needs of her community. And she recites twenty-four blessings before the congregation: The eighteen blessings of the everyday *Amida* prayer, to which she adds another six blessings.

#### ב:ג

ּוְכֵן עִיר שֶׁלֹּא יֶרְדוּ עָלֶיהָ גְשָׁמִים, דְּכְתִיב (עמוס ד) וְהִמְטַרְתִּי עַל עִיר אֶחָת וְעַל עִיר אַחַת לא אַמְטִיר, חֶלְקָה אַחַת תִּמָטֵר וְגוֹ', אוֹתָהּ הָעִיר מִתְעַנָּה וּמַתְרַעַת, וְכָל סְבִיבוֹתֶיהָ, מִתְעַנּוֹת וְלֹא מַתְרִיעוֹת. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר, מַתְרִיעוֹת וְלֹא מִתְעַנּוֹת:



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And likewise, if there is a particular city upon which it did not rain, (while the surrounding area did receive rain,) this is considered a divine curse, as it is written: "And I caused it to rain upon one city, but caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the portion upon which it did not rain withered" (Amos 4:7). In a case of this kind, that city fasts and cries out by blowing the *shofar*, and all of its surrounding areas join them in their fast, but they do not cry out. Rabbi Akiva disagrees and says: They cry out but they do not fast.

ד:ח

אָמַר רַבָּן שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשָּׁרָאֵל פַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בְּאָב וּכְיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים, שֶׁבָּקֶן בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת בִּכְלֵי לָבָן שְׁאוּלִין, שֶׁלֹּא לְבַיֵּשׁ אֶת מִי שֶׁאֵין לוֹ. כָּל הַבֵּלִים טְעוּנִין טְבִילָה. וּבְנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת וְחוֹלוֹת בַּכְּרַמִים. וּמֶה הָיוּ אוֹמְרוֹת, בָּחוּר, שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיך וּרְאֵה, מֶה אַתָּה בוֹרֵר לָךָ. אַל תִּתֵּן עֵינֶיך בַנּוֹי, תֵּן עֵינֶיך בַמִּשְׁפָּחָה. שָׁקֶר הַחֵן וְהָבֶל הַיּפִי, אִשְׁה יִרְאַת ה' הִיא תִתְהַזֶּל (משלי לֹא). וְאוֹמֵר, תְּנוּ לָה מִפּרִי יָדֶיהָ, וִיהַלְלוּהָ בַשְׁעָרִים מַעֲשֶׂיהָ. וְסֵבֶר הַחֵן וְהָבֶל הַיֹּפִי, אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת ה' הִיא תִתְהַזֶּל (משלי לֹא). וְאוֹמֵר, תְּנוּ לָה מִפּרִי יָדֶיהָ, וִיהַלְלוּהָ בַשְׁעָרִים מַעֲשֶׁיהָ. וְכֵנו הוּא אוֹמַר, צְאֶינָה וּרְאֶינָה בְּנוֹת צִיוֹן בַּמֶּלֶך שְׁלֹמֹה בְּעֲטָרָה שָׁעִשְׁיהָ.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and as Yom Kippur, as on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white clothes, which each woman borrowed from another. Why were they borrowed? They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments. All the garments that the women borrowed require immersion. And the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? Young man, please lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself for a wife. Do not set your eyes toward beauty, but set your eyes toward a good family, as the verse states: "Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30), and it further says: "Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31:31). And similarly, it says in another verse: "Go forth, daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, upon the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song of Songs 3:11). "On the day of his wedding,"; this is the giving of the Torah. "And on the day of the gladness of his heart"; this is the building of the Temple, may it be rebuilt speedily in our days.