

The Weekly Daf



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Yevamot 55 - 61

Issue # 311 Parshat Yitro

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Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Who Committed Bigamy?

A *kohen gadol*, because of his sacred status, is severely restricted in regard to whom he may marry. A widow, a non-virgin and even a virgin *bogeret* (a girl half-year past puberty which usually takes place at age 12) are all forbidden to him, in addition to the divorcee and other women forbidden even to regular *kohanim*.

How about bigamy? May a *kohen gadol*, according to Torah law, have more than one wife just like every other Jew? (The ban on polygamy was instituted by rabbinic decree almost a thousand years ago.)

In Mesechta Yoma (13a) we find that he may not be married to two women while performing the *Beit Hamikdash* service on Yom Kippur.

(*Vayikra* 16:11) which implies, through the use of the singular term, that he can have only one wife, not two households. Although this seems limited to Yom Kippur, Rambam (*Laws of Forbidden Relations* 17:13) rules that a *kohen gadol* may never be married to two women at the same time. Ravid challenges this extension, arguing that the prohibition was intended to prevent a situation in which the *kohen gadol* should be the victim of a contaminating nocturnal emission as a result of thoughts about two women and thus be disqualified for the Yom Kippur service. Although he concludes that it would make sense for the *kohen gadol* to avoid marrying two women so that he will not be forced to divorce one of them just before Yom Kippur, Ravid cites the following historical example from Tanach to challenge this ruling:

Yehoyada was the *kohen gadol*

the eyes of Hashem all the days of the *kohen Yehoyada*, and he took for him two wives and begot sons (*Divrei Hayamim II*, 24:2-3)

Regarding the Talmudic source for a prohibition on bigamy, the Maggid Mishneh, in his commentary on Rambam, points out that it is not the *gemara* cited by Ravid but rather our *gemara* which derives from the passage (*Vayikra* 21:14)

wife. This approach requires an understanding of our *gemara* radically different from the one conveyed by Rashi, but it provides us with a source not limited to Yom Kippur alone. But what about the challenge from the bigamy of the righteous *kohen gadol* Yehoyada?

A fascinating solution to this problem is provided by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chayot in the name of Rabbi Zal

Rambam will read the passage as reporting that Yehoyada, who was the mentor of the king who ascended the throne at the age of seven, married Yoash, who was not a *kohen*, to two women. The historical

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Talmudic statement explaining why there is a distinction between the laws of *tumah* (ritual impurity) regarding the graves of Jews and non-Jews has often been exploited throughout history by anti-Semites as a weapon of incitement against the Jews. They deviously portrayed this as a putdown of non-Jews as being less than human. This is, of course, a patent distortion obvious to anyone familiar with Torah and Talmudic sources. We here offer explanations from three great Torah scholars in regard to this statement:

The simplest approach is supplied by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chayot. In the literature of any religion, the

or Tanach it therefore refers only to the Jewish nation bound by the rules of the Torah. This is not a comment on the humanity of non-Jews, only an exclusion of them as not being subject to those laws.

A more sophisticated explanation is offered by Rabbi commentary on Mesehcta Avot (3:14). The spiritual development of the Jews is the result of the Torah which Hashem gave them at Sinai and not the product of their own intellectual search. In this they are similar to Adam, the first man, who was endowed by his Creator with a supreme understanding. The non-Jew who has developed spiritually and both past and present are replete with sufficient examples of righteous gentiles are self-made men who achieved what they did through their own intellectual efforts.

the *all* of mankind, as Tosefot points out, *bnei Adam*

(sons of Man) because they are biologically the offspring of the first man, even if they are not similar to him in being endowed with knowledge rather than having to make it on their own.

A third explanation, in a different vein, was put forth by the initiator of the Daf Hayomi which is the framework of this column. When Mendel Beiles was on trial in Czarist Russia on trumped-up charges of murdering a gentile neighbor, the rabbi of the Polish community of Lublin, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was asked to explain this statement in a brief to the court which seemed to be trying all of Jewry and not just a single

explained, could only refer to the Jewish nation which is accused in its entirety, as one man, for the alleged crime of a single individual. It is also an expression of the responsibility each Jew feels for his fellow Jew, a sense which indeed makes them unique in combining an entire nation into

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