

Name: _____

Date: _____

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah, *Perakim* 1 and 2

Directions:

In these texts, the Mishnah describes how the Sanhedrin, the highest court in ancient times, used to declare Rosh Hodesh every month. Work with your *havrutah* to read and discuss these texts. Listen carefully to one another, and ask one another questions if there is something about the texts or about your conversation that you do not understand. Answer the "Guide Questions" together to make sure that you understand everything that you read.

***Perek* 1, Mishnah 9: Traveling to the Sanhedrin**

A person who has seen the new moon but cannot walk to the Sanhedrin: they bring him on a donkey or even in a bed. People afraid of being attacked by robbers may take sticks with them; and if they have a long way to go, they may carry their food in their hands and walk a day and a night on the road and profane the Shabbat to testify about the appearance of the new moon. For it is written (in Leviticus 23:4), "These are the feasts of the Lord, the holy days, which you must announce in their appointed times."

Questions for Discussion:

- *What does the Mishnah suggest to encourage witnesses who cannot walk to come to testify about the new moon?*
- *What does the Mishnah suggest to encourage witnesses who are concerned for their safety to come to testify?*
- *What does the Mishnah suggest to encourage witnesses who would not want to come a long distance on Shabbat to come to testify?*
- *According to this Mishnah, why is it important that the witnesses go to the court to testify?*
- *Why do you think that the Mishnah is trying so hard to help these witnesses get to the Sanhedrin? What does this teach us about the importance of testifying about the new moon?*

Perek 2, Mishnah 5, 6, 8: Testifying at the Sanhedrin

There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem called Beit Yazek, where all the witnesses met and were examined by the Sanhedrin (court)... Great meals were made for them there, in order to make them want to come often.

How were witnesses examined? The first pair was always examined first. The eldest of the pair was introduced first. He was asked the following questions:

- In what phase did you see the moon?
- Was the moon in front of the sun or behind the sun?
- Was the moon to the north or to the south of the sun?
- How high in the sky was the moon? In what direction was the moon leaning?
- How wide was the moon?

If he said, "in front of the sun," his evidence was not valid. The second witness was then brought in and examined; if the evidence was found to agree, their testimony was received as valid. The remaining pairs of witnesses were then asked some questions, not because the court needed to hear their stories, but only so that they wouldn't be disappointed and would want to come another time....

Rabban Gamliel had, on a chart, and on the walls of his room ... pictures of the moon, which he showed to witnesses who weren't knowledgeable, and he asked them, "Was it of this shape, or of that?"

Questions for Discussion:

- *Do you have any question about these texts?*
- *What did the Sanhedrin do to make witnesses want to come back another month? Why do you think that the Sanhedrin wanted them to come back?*
- *Why do you think that the Sanhedrin asked so many questions?*
- *Would you want to be a witness at the Sanhedrin? Why or why not?*

Perek 2, Mishnah 7, 2: Announcing Rosh Hodesh

Note: We have quoted the next mishnayot out of order to make them easier to understand.

(After the witnesses' testimony was accepted), the chief of the Sanhedrin said that Rosh Hodesh is *mekudash* [made holy], ראש חודש מקודש, and all the people said after him, "*Mekudash, mekudash!*" "מקודש, מקודש!"

They used to light flaming torches on the tops of the mountains to announce Rosh Hodesh, but when [a group of people named] the Samaritans led the nation to make mistakes, they began sending messengers instead.

Questions for Discussion:

- *What did the Sanhedrin do to make sure that everyone knew that it was Rosh Hodesh?*
- *Why was it so important for everyone to know that it was Rosh Hodesh?*