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The first half of this book discusses **cutoff dates**. Different issues in life have different cutoff dates. For example, the dates on contracts used to be counted from the start of the reign of the current king. For purposes of counting **how many years a Jewish king has ruled**, the cutoff date is the first new moon of spring (i.e., 1st of Nisan).

Similarly, when considering the **cycle of holidays** (Pesach, Shavuot, Succos) we consider the **cutoff date of a new round** of holidays to be the first new moon of Nisan.

In ancient Israel, when separating out a **percentage of your produce to donate to the charity** (to the Priest, Levite, poor, etc), which might be called a tithe or tax on your produce, the cutoff of the tax year depends on what type of produce you're referring to.

For tithing **animals**, the rabbis disagreed as to whether the cutoff date is at the **middle of summer** (1st of Elul) or **end of summer** (Rosh Hashanah).

For tithing most types of **vegetables**, the cutoff date is at the **end of summer** (Rosh Hashanah).

For tithing fruit from trees, **Hillel** (2000 yrs ago) said the cutoff date is on **Tu Beshvat**, in **mid-winter**, whereas **Shamai** said its 15 days before that.

The start date of the **Shmita** year (which occurs every 7 yrs) and **Yovel** (Jubilee, which occurs every 50 yrs) is at the **end of summer** (Rosh Hashanah).

These are just **basic rules** regarding cut-off dates, and the Talmud mentioned dozens of **exceptions-to-the-rule** and rabbinical **disagreements** on some of these dates. Over the course of 70 pages, Talmud explains the **sources** for these rules. And discusses **related rules**, such as rules concerning

- **who receives** the tithes (priest, levite, poor, or the tither himself when visiting Jerusalem)
- If someone vows to refrain from something (like smoking or drinking) "till the end of the year", which fiscal year is he referring to?
- when is the cut-off date for Gd to **judge** us and declare our **fate** for the coming year,
- which **human behaviors** does Gd take into account when He judges us,
- what **types of sins** are more punishable and less forgivable,
- what **good deeds** are **especially effective** in influencing Gd to not punish us.
- issues about **reward and punishment** after death (heaven and hell).
- On what 5 dates of the year are we **obligated to fast**.
- on what dates are we **prohibited from fasting**.
- the **historical events** leading up to the building of the 2nd Temple in 500BC.
- the philosophical reason for blowing a shofar.
- a lot of Biblical passages related to forgiveness that appear to contradict each other.
- It explains (end of daf 17) how **Rosh Chodesh** used to be determined – the **procedures and rules**, the **astronomical considerations** and **mathematical calculations**. (how **witnesses converged** on Jerusalem to testify they saw the new moon, **interrogating** the witnesses, **declaring** the day Rosh Chodesh, **sending** messengers to foreign countries to spread the word that Rosh Chodesh was declared.)

Only in the **last third** of the book does it discuss the topic of, what we now-a-days call Rosh Hashana:

- laws of **shofar** (**philosophical reasons** for, from **what animals** can a shofar be made, **how** you **make** it, **who** may blow it, **how** to blow it)
- liturgy of the Rosh Hashana Amidah (Shmoneh Esreh on Rosh Hashana).

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The last couple of pages deal with Amidah on other days besides Rosh Hashana. Soon after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70AD, Raban Gamliel (RG) commissioned Rabbi Shimon Hapkudi to compose the Shmoneh Esrai, to be recited by Jews 3 times a day, to take the place of the daily sacrifices of the Temple. And the rabbis at that time decreed that every Jew is obligated to recite the Amida every morning and afternoon. Since the prayer book wasn't invented yet, they decreed that a Jew could fulfill his obligation to recite the Shmoneh Esrai by merely paraphrasing it. And since many Jews couldn't even paraphrase it, the rabbis of the time agreed that a chazan should repeat the Shmoneh Esreh aloud after the congregation recited it quietly, so that those who couldn't say it themselves could fulfill their obligation by listening intently to what the chazan recites and responding Amen to indicate their agreement to what the chazan recited, so that it would be considered as though they said it themselves.

RG decreed that even a Jew who IS able to say Amida by himself can avoid doing reciting Amida by responding Amen to the chazan's repetition of the Amida. However, most other rabbis believed that someone who has the ability to recite Amida on own **must** recite it on his own, and cannot fulfill his obligation by simply responding Amen to the chazan. A generation later, the famous Rabbi Meir agreed with RG only for high holiday Amidahs, since high holiday Amidahs are exceptionally long. A few generations later, all the other rabbis came around to agree with RG even for all year round, that even someone who is able to recite Amida himself can fulfill his obligation by listening to the chazan's repetition of Amida and responding Amen to show agreement.