With the development of Jewish law during the rabbinic period, different customs emerged in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia. One such divergence was in the prayer for rain, i.e. the insertion of the phrase ve-ten tal u-matar li-verakhah (grant dew and rain for a blessing) into the Shemoneh 'Esreh. The practice in the Land of Israel was to begin the recitation of this prayer usually in early October, setting the date in accordance with the Jewish lunisolar calendar. The Babylonian custom was to start praying for rain in late November on a date fixed in the solar calendar. Our purpose here is to analyze the reasons for the development of these two separate practices.

I

Mishnah Ta'anit 1:3 tells of a dispute between an anonymous tanna and Rabban Gamaliel1) concerning when the saying of the prayer for rain should start. The former gives the third of Marheshvan as the proper date, while the latter says, “On the seventh of that month, fifteen days after the feast [of Sukkot], so that even the tardiest Israelite may reach the Euphrates [on the return journey from the pilgrimage to Jerusalem].” The Babylo-

1) Some texts read Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel; cf. Raphael RABBINOVICZ, Diqduqei Soferim, Ta'anit, reprinted, Jerusalem, 1960, p. 50. For other textual variants, see Jacob N. EPSTEIN, Mavo Le-Nusah Ha-Mishnah, Jerusalem, 5724, 2, pp. 1161-62.
nian Talmud thereupon quotes Rabbi Eleazar2) as saying, “the halakhah is in accordance with Rabban Gamaliel”3).

Immediately after Rabbi Eleazar’s endorsement of Rabban Gamaliel’s ruling, a supplementary opinion is offered: “A baraita records: ‘Hananiah says, ‘But in the Golah, [one waits] until the sixtieth day from the [autumnal] equinox’ ’”4). This statement has a parallel in the Jerusalem Talmud: “Hananiah, the son of Rabbi Joshua’s brother, says, ‘In the Golah they do not act [lo5 nahagu] in this manner, but rather [they wait] until the sixtieth day from the [autumnal] equinox’ ”5). In both versions, Hananiah’s statement is followed by the assertion of Samuel that “the halakhah is in accordance with Hananiah”6). The practice of beginning the prayer for rain on the seventh of Marheshvan was, thus, not universal.

Hananiah, a second century tanna, in referring to the Golah, was undoubtedly speaking not of the entire diaspora but only of

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2) Some texts read R. Hisda instead of R. Eleazar; see Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili, Hiddushei Ha-Ritba, Ta’anit ed. E. Lichtenstein, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 35-36; Henry Malter, The Treatise Ta’anit of the Babylonian Talmud, New York, 1930, pp. 10, 34. Ritba and Malter argue that reading R. Eleazar makes much more sense than R. Hisda. David Halivni, Sources and Traditions (Hebrew), Yoma to Hagiga, Jerusalem, 5735, pp. 435-37, however, reads R. Hisda (especially in the context of Bab. Tacanit 4b); cf. also Amemar’s statement in Ta’anit 6a, and see below, nn. 18, 74.


4) "Hananiah omer u-va-golah 'ad shishim yom ba-tequfah." Malter, p. 69 (p. 138), translates Hananiah’s statement as ‘‘In the diaspora we must wait until the sixtieth day after the autumnal equinox.” As we shall show, this translation is incorrect on three accounts. Ba-golah is not “in the diaspora” in general, but in one particular diaspora country, viz., Babylonia. Malter’s phrase, “we must wait”, is interpolated gratuitously into the sentence without any foundation in the Hebrew text. Shishim yom ba-tequfah, which means literally “the sixtieth day of the [autumn] season,” can be translated as “the sixtieth day from the equinox” (as we do) since the season (tequfah) starts on the day of the equinox (also called tequfah), but it cannot be understood to mean, as Malter’s translation implies, the sixty-first day of the season. The dispute between Rav and Samuel, reported below, is in regard to whether the word 'ad (until), in the phrase ‘as shishim yom (until the sixtieth day), is inclusive or exclusive.


6) Bab. Ta’anit 10a; Jer. Ta’anit 63d. In the Babylonian Talmud, this statement is quoted by Rav Huna bar Hiyya in the name of Samuel.