

I. Nu, Did You Wash Your Hands? The Rabbis as the Original Jewish Mothers

A. Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 4:18

The following things require washing the hands in water [after them]: One who rises from bed, goes out of the bathroom, or of the bath house, one who cuts his nails, takes off his shoes, touches his feet, or washes his head, some say: also one who goes among the dead, or touched the dead, one who cleanses his clothes of lice, has sexual intercourse, touches a louse, or touches his body with his hand. Anyone doing any of these and not washing his hands, if he is a scholar, his studies are forgotten, and if he is not a scholar, he goes out of his mind.

II. Neat Freaks: Degrees of Impurity

A. Mishnah Pesachim 1:6

Rabbi Hanina the vice-chief of the priests says: during all of the days of the priests they never refrained from burning [sacrificial] meat which had been defiled by an v'lad ha'tum'ah (first degree of tum'ah) with meat which had been defiled by an av ha'tum'ah (father of uncleanness), even though they add uncleanness to its uncleanness. Rabbi Akiva added and said: during [all] the days of the priests they did not refrain from lighting oil which had been rendered unclean by a tevul yom (an impure person who has immersed, but night has not fallen so he is not yet pure) in a lamp which had been made unclean by one who had contracted corpse impurity, even though they add uncleanness to its uncleanness.

B. Commentary on Mishnah Pesachim 1:6, Pinchas Kehati

This Mishnah deals with burning together sanctified meat that had contracted a minor uncleanness with a sanctified meat that had contracted a severe uncleanness; it is cited here incidental to the following mishnah. As has already been mentioned in a number of places in our commentary, there are different degrees of uncleanness.

The uncleanness of a corpse is avi avot hatum'ah, the progenitor of uncleanness. Everything, whether a man or vessels, that contracted uncleanness from a corpse is av hatum'ah, a primary source of uncleanness. There are also other primary sources of uncleanness, including, inter alia, the carcass of an unclean reptile, the carcass of an animal that died by means other than ritual slaughter, the zav (a person suffering from a seminal flux), and the leper. If a person is contaminated by an av ha'tum'ah, he becomes rishon l'tumah (first degree of uncleanness); a rishon le'tum'ah can only contaminate foods of liquids, when then becomes a sheni le'tum'ah (second degree of uncleanness). The law is that a sheni may contaminated terumah, making it a shelishi le'tum'ah, and a shelishi may contaminate sacrifices, making it a revi'l le'tum'ah (fourth degree of uncleanness). All the degrees below av hatum'ah are called "velad hatum'ah." An av ha'tum'ah is termed a "severe" uncleanness, because it imparts uncleanness to a person or a vessel. A v'lad hatum'ah is termed a "minor" uncleanness, because it cannot impart uncleanness to a person or to vessels, but only to foodstuffs and liquids.

III. Suspicion of Others

A. Mishnah Chagigah 2:7

The garments of an am ha'aretz possess midras-impurity (impurity passed from an impure person to an object which then makes the person who touches it impure) for Pharisees. The garments of Pharisees possess midras-impurity for those who eat terumah. The garments of those who eat terumah possess midras-impurity for [those who eat] sacred things. The garments of [those who eat] sacred things possess midras-impurity for [those who occupy themselves with the waters of] purification.

Yose ben Yoezer was the most pious in the priesthood, yet his apron was [considered to possess] midras-impurity for [those who ate] sacred things. Yohanan ben Gudguda all his life used to eat [unconsecrated food] in accordance with the purity required for sacred things, yet his apron was [considered to possess] midras-impurity for [those who occupied themselves with the water of] purification.

B. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 15a-b

Yosei ben Yo'ezer of Tzereida and Yosei ben Yoḥanan of Jerusalem decreed impurity upon the land of the nations and upon glass vessels. The Gemara asks: Was it these two Sages, who were among the first Sages in the era of the pairs, who issued these decrees? **Wasn't it the Sages who lived in the final eighty years of the Second Temple period who issued these decrees? As Rav Kahana said: When Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yosei, fell ill, the Sages sent to him: Rabbi, tell us two or three statements that you once told us in the name of your father. He sent to them: This is what my father said: One hundred and eighty years before the Temple was destroyed, the evil kingdom of Rome invaded Israel. Eighty years before the Temple was destroyed, they decreed impurity on the land of the nations and on glass vessels. Forty years before the Temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin was exiled from the Chamber of Hewn Stones and sat in the stores on the Temple Mount...**

Rather, this decree was issued in stages. First, Yosei ben Yo'ezer and Yosei ben Yoḥanan **came and issued a decree** that *teruma* that comes into contact with a **clump** of earth of the land of the nations is **to be burned, and** they decreed **nothing** with regard to *teruma* that enters into **the air** space of the land of the nations. **The Sages of the final eighty years** prior to the destruction of the Temple **came and issued a decree** with regard to *teruma* that enters into **the air** space of the land of the nations that its legal status is **in abeyance**, and it is not burned.

IV. Purity and Danger

A. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Niddah 31b

It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say: Why did the Torah ordain that the status of menstruation should continue for seven days? Because being in constant contact with his wife, a husband might develop a loathing for her. The Torah therefore decreed: Let

her be in *niddah* for seven days in order that she shall be beloved by her husband as at the time of her first entry into the bridal chamber.

B. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ketubot 61a

Said Rav Yitzhak bar Hananaya in the name of Rav Huna: All the labors that a woman performs for her husband, a *niddah* [may perform] for her husband, expect mixing the wine, making the bed, and washing his face, hands, and feet. Rava said: That only means in his presence; but if done not in his presence, we have no problem [with her doing these things].

C. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 13a-b

The Sage in the school of Eliyahu taught a baraita that deals with this halakha: There was an incident involving one student who studied much Mishnah and read much Bible, and served Torah scholars extensively, studying Torah from them, and, nevertheless, died at half his days, half his life expectancy. His wife in her bitterness would take his phylacteries and go around with them to synagogues and study halls, and she said to the Sages: It is written in the Torah: “For it is your life and the length of your days” (Deuteronomy 30:20). If so, my husband who studied much Mishnah, and read much Bible, and served Torah scholars extensively, why did he die at half his days? Where is the length of days promised him in the verse? No one would respond to her astonishment at all.

Eliyahu said: One time I was a guest in her house, and she was relating that entire event with regard to the death of her husband. And I said to her: My daughter, during the period of your menstruation, how did he act toward you? She said to me: Heaven forbid, he did not touch me even with his little finger. And I asked her: In the days of your white garments (during the seven clean days), after the menstrual flow ended, and you were just counting clean days, how did he act toward you then? She said to me: He ate with me, and drank with me, and slept with me with bodily contact and, however, it did not enter his mind about something else, i.e., conjugal relations. And I said to her: Blessed is the Omnipresent who killed him for this sin, as your husband did not show respect to the Torah. The Torah said: “And to a woman in the separation of her impurity you should not approach” (Leviticus 18:19), even mere affectionate contact is prohibited.

D. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, p. 36-37

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.... It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing...

E. Psalms 24:3-4

Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken a false oath by My life or sworn deceitfully.