

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Avodah Zarah 72 - Horiyos 3

Week of 27 Kislev-3 Teves 5756 / 20-26 December 1995
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Mystery of the Mikveh

The Rule:	A vessel used for preparing or serving food or drink which has been purchased from a non-Jew must be immersed in a mikveh before it may be thus used.	
The Question:	What is the purpose of this immersion?	
The Possibilities:	<p>Kashering — the Torah (Bamidbar 31:23) records the divine command to the Jewish soldiers who conquered the Medianites that in order to use the metal vessels captured in that war they must first <i>kasher</i> them by removing any non-kosher food particles which they may have absorbed. If absorption was through boiling then boiling is sufficient to achieve elimination; if it was through broiling then the vessel must be directly exposed to fire to achieve this purpose.</p> <p>After legislating such fiery kashering the Torah adds a requirement for "purifying" the vessels through immersion in a mikveh, suggesting that this immersion is another step in the kashering process.</p>	<p>Purification — The transfer of ownership from a non-Jew to a Jew requires some ritual to express this elevation from a lower level of spiritual responsibility to a higher one.</p>
The Problems:	<p>Possibility One would only make sense if there existed a possibility of some non-kosher food still remaining within the vessel. Since immersion is required even for a brand new vessel and for a vessel which has been kashered and is like new we must reject <i>kashering</i> as the purpose of the immersion.</p>	<p>Possibility Two should require immersion even if a Jew buys scissors or any other instrument not used for food. Since the Torah mentions immersion only in regard to vessels used for food this would seem to rule out this approach of purification.</p>
The Resolution:	Immersion of vessels is indeed commanded as a way of achieving purification but only in regard to those items related to food because it is in regard to dietary laws that the gap in spiritual responsibility is so pronounced that it requires some ritual to express the elevation from one standard to the other.	

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Shared Responsibility

When Rabbi Huna would have to judge a financial case he would convene ten scholars from the yeshiva to help him rule on the case.

When a question regarding the kashrus of an animal was brought before Rabbi Ashi he would gather ten shochetim who were experts in the field to help him decide the matter.

The reason offered by both of them was:

"In order that everyone should get a splinter from the log."

Two explanations are offered for this imaginative statement. Rashi's approach is that these sages were, despite their expertise, afraid that they might err in their judgment and sought partners with whom to share the guilt for such an error.

Maharsha, however, suggests that they were hesitant to assume the ability to carry the heavy log of judgment by themselves and sought partners to help them carry the load. A Torah source for this imagery is found in Hashem's command to Moshe Rabbeinu (Bamidbar 11:17) to gather seventy elders "who will carry the burden of the nation along with you since you cannot carry it alone."

Horiyos 3b

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22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎972-2-810-315 fax: 972-2-812-890 ✉ohr@jer1.co.il
38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎1-212-213-3100 fax: 1-212-213-8717 ✉RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com
613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎1-905-886-5730 fax: 1-905-886-6065 ✉avram.rothman@canrem.com

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