

Human Fallibility: Why we Wash for Bread - Chullin 33a

The Gemara in Chullin 33a discusses the rabbinic resolution that hands require washing before eating *terumah*. The reason behind this exposes rabbinic awareness that people are just people. We are forgetful and may not always notice what we are doing. This a cornerstone of rabbinic thought.

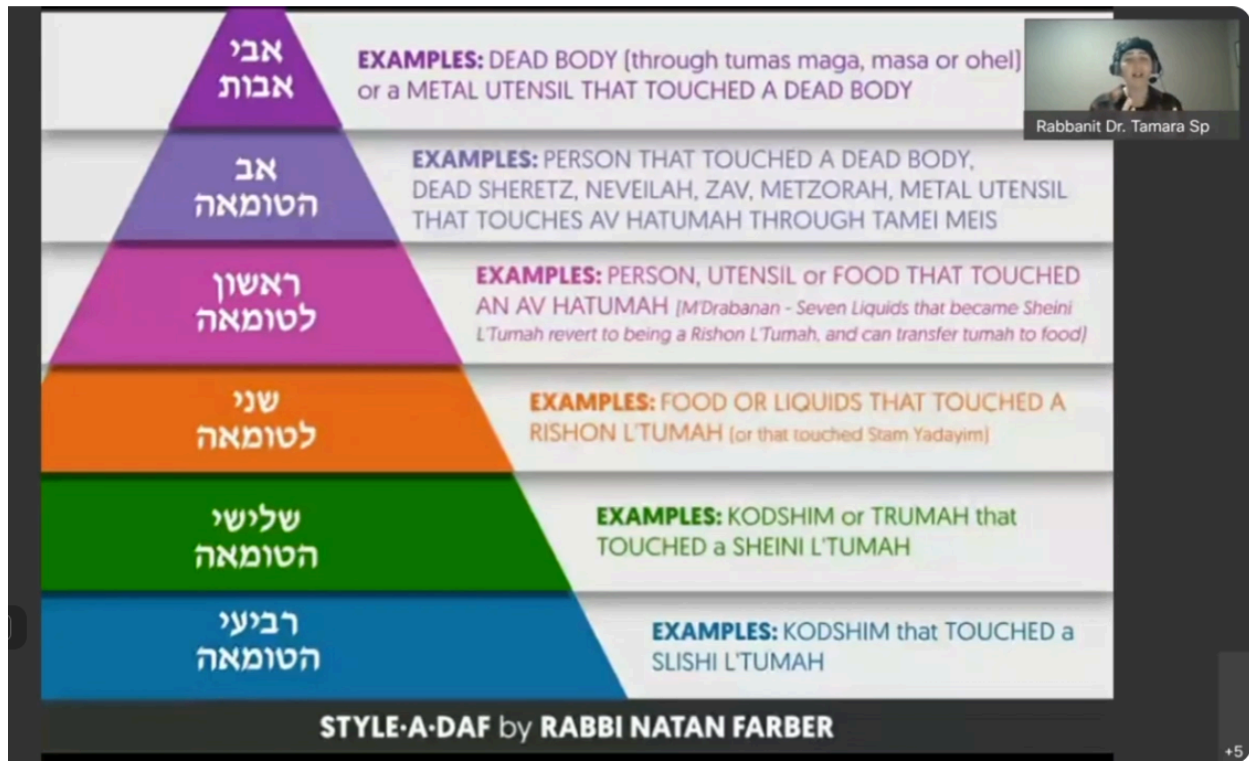
1. חולין לג.

מתני' השוחט בהמה חיה ועוף ולא יצא מהן דם – כשרים, ונאכלין בידיהם מסואבות, לפי שלא הוקשרו בדם. רבי שמעון אומר: הוקשרו בשחיטה.

MISHNA: In the case of one who slaughters a domesticated animal, an undomesticated animal, or a bird, and blood did not emerge from them during the slaughter, all of these are permitted for consumption and do not require the ritual washing of the hands as they may be eaten with ritually impure [*mesoavot*] hands, because they were not rendered susceptible to ritual impurity through contact with blood, which is one of the seven liquids that render food susceptible to impurity. Rabbi Shimon says: They were rendered susceptible to ritual impurity by means of the slaughter itself.

גמ' טעמא דלא יצא מהן דם, הא יצא מהן דם – אין נאכלים בידיהם מסואבות. אמאי? ידיה שניות הן, ואין שני עושה שלישי בחולין!

GEMARA: The reason that they may be eaten with ritually impure hands is that blood did not emerge from the animals or birds during the slaughter; but if blood emerged from them during slaughter, they may not be eaten with ritually impure hands. The Gemara asks: Why not? Ordinary hands are impure with second-degree ritual impurity and an item of second-degree impurity cannot impart third-degree impurity to non-sacred items with which it comes into contact.



See also [here](#) for an introduction to tum'ah (ritual impurity) and taharah (ritual purity).

2. בבלי שבת יג:

מתני' ואלו מן ההלכות שאמרו בעליית חנניה בן חזקיה בן גרון. ששעלו לבקרו, נמנו, ורבו בית שמאי על בית הלל. ושמונה עשר דברים גזרו בו ביום.

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מאי נינהו שמנה עשר דבר? דתנן, אלו פוסלין את התרומה: האוכל אוכל ראשון, והאוכל אוכל שני, והשוטה משקין טמאין, והבא ראשו ורובו במים שאובין, וטהור שנפלו על ראשו ורובו שלשה לוגין מים שאובין, והספר, והידים, והטבול יום, והאוכלים והכלים שנטמאו במשקין.

What are those eighteen matters? The Gemara answers: As we learned in a mishna, a list of the decrees that the Sages issued with regard to items whose level of impurity is such that if they come into contact with *teruma* they disqualify it. By means of that contact, the *teruma* itself becomes impure, but it does not transmit impurity to other items. These disqualify *teruma*: One who eats food with first degree ritual impurity status acquired as a result of contact with a primary source of ritual impurity, e.g., a creeping animal; and one who eats food with second degree ritual impurity status acquired as a result of contact with an item with first degree ritual impurity status; and one who drinks impure liquids of any degree of impurity; and one whose head and most of his body come into drawn water after he immersed himself in a ritual bath to purify himself; and a ritually pure person that three *log* of drawn water fell on his head and most of his body; and a Torah scroll; and the hands of any person who did not purify himself for the

purpose of handling *teruma*; and one who immersed himself during the day, i.e., one who was impure and immersed himself, and until evening he is not considered completely pure; and foods and vessels that became impure by coming into contact with impure liquids.

2a. בבלי שבת יד.

והידיים — מפני שהידיים עסקניות הן

And the hands; the reason that the Sages decreed impurity upon them is because hands are busy

2b. בבלי שבת יד-טו.

וידים תלמידי שמאי והלל גזור? שמאי והלל גזור! דתניא: יוסי בן יועזר איש צרידה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים גזרו טומאה על ארץ העמים ועל כלי זכוכית. שמעון בן שטח תיקן כתובה לאשה, וגזר טומאה על כלי מתכות. שמאי והלל גזרו טומאה על הידיים!

Among the list of items in the mishna with regard to which the disciples of Shammai and Hillel instituted decrees, were the hands of any person who did not purify himself for the sake of purity of *teruma*. If he came into contact with *teruma*, the Sages decreed it impure. The Gemara asks: And with regard to hands, was it the disciples of Shammai and Hillel who issued the decree of impurity? Shammai and Hillel themselves issued the decree. As it was taught in a *baraita*: Yosei ben Yo'ezer of Tzereida and Yosei ben Yohanan of Jerusalem decreed impurity on the land of the nations, that the land outside Eretz Yisrael transmits impurity; and they decreed impurity on glass vessels, even though glass is not listed in the Torah among the vessels that can become impure. Shimon ben Shatah instituted the formula of a woman's marriage contract and also decreed special impurity on metal vessels. Shammai and Hillel decreed impurity on the hands.

וכי תימא שמאי וסיעתו והלל וסיעתו, והאמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: שמנה עשר דבר גזרו, ובשמנה עשר נחלקו. ואילו הלל ושמאי לא נחלקו אלא בשלשה מקומות, דאמר רב הונא: בשלשה מקומות נחלקו ותו לא. וכי תימא: אתו אינהו גזור לתלות, ואתו תלמידיהו וגזרו לשרוף. והאמר אילפא: ידיים תחלת גזירתן לשריפה! אלא אתו אינהו גזור ולא קבלו מיניהו, ואתו תלמידיהו גזרו וקבלו מיניהו.

And if you say that the *baraita* is referring to Shammai and his faction and Hillel and his faction, didn't Rav Yehuda say that Shmuel said: With regard to eighteen matters they issued decrees that day, and with regard to those eighteen matters they disagreed prior to that? The eighteen disputes were only between the disciples of Shammai and Hillel, whereas Hillel and Shammai themselves argued only in three places. Clearly, they were neither party to the disputes nor the decrees. As Rav Huna said: Shammai and Hillel disagreed in only three places and no more. And if you say that Hillel and Shammai came and decreed that *teruma* that came into contact with hands would be in abeyance, and their students came and decreed to burn *teruma* that came into contact with hands, then the following difficulty arises. Didn't Ilfa, one of the Sages, say: With regard to hands, from the beginning their decree was that *teruma* that comes into contact with them is to be burned? According to Ilfa, there is no uncertainty. *Teruma* that came into contact with definite impurity is burned. *Teruma* that is in abeyance may not be destroyed. One must wait until it becomes definitely impure or decomposes on its own. Rather, the explanation is that they came and issued a decree and the people did not accept the decree from them, and their disciples came and issued a decree and they accepted it from them.

ואַפְתִּי, שְׁלֵמָה גָזַר! דָּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: בְּשַׁעַת שְׁתִּיקוֹן שְׁלֵמָה עִירוּבֵין וְנִטְיֵלַת יְדַיִם, יִצְתָה בֵּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: "בְּנֵי אִם חֲכָם לִבְךָ יִשְׁמַח לְבִי גַם אָנִי", "חֲכָם בְּנֵי וְשִׁמַּח לְבִי וְאִשִּׁיבָה חוֹרְפֵי דְבָר!" — אָתָּא

The Gemara asks further: Still, the matter is not clear, as the decree of hands was issued by King Solomon. As Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: At the time that Solomon instituted the ordinances of *eiruv* and of washing hands to purify them from their impurity, a Divine Voice emerged and said in his praise: "My son, if your heart is wise my heart will be glad, even mine" (Proverbs 23:15), and so too: "My son, be wise and make my heart glad, that I may respond to those who taunt me" (Proverbs 27: 11). The Gemara responds: Came

2c. ט"ו א

שְׁלֵמָה גָזַר לְקַדְּשִׁים, וְאָתָּו אֵינְהוּ וְגִזּוֹר אָף לְתֵרוּמָה.

Solomon and decreed impurity on hands to prohibit contact with consecrated items, and Shammai, Hillel, and their disciples came and decreed impurity on hands even to prohibit contact with *teruma*.

3. רש"י שבת יד.

עסקניות הן - ונוגעין בבשרו ובמקום טנופת וגנאי לתרומה בכך ונמאס לאוכלין כשנוגע בה בידיים מסואבות ורבותינו מפרשים חיישין שמא נגעו [ידי] בטומאה [ונטמא] וקשיא לי אם כן ניחוש שמא נגע באב הטומאה ונמצא ראשון ויטמאנה ועוד מאי שנא ידיים לחודייהו בכל גופו נגזור לפסול תרומה שמא נגעו ידיי בטומאה ונטמא כל גופו ועוד לא תסגי להו בנטילה אלא בטבילה:

4. בית הבחירה של המאירי שבת יד.

הידיים והוא שיתבאר למטה שבימי שלמה גזרו עליהן להיותן שניות מן הסתם כל שהסיח דעתו מהם אע"פ שלא ידע בטומאתן מצד שמועדות הם שלא ליזהר אלא מן הטומאות הגדולות והמפורסמות

5. משנה זבים היב

אלו פוסלים את התרומה. האוכל אכל ראשון, והאוכל אכל שני, והשותה משקין טמאין, והבא ראשו ורבו במים שאובין, וטהור שנפלו על ראשו ועל רבו שלשה לגין מים שאובין, והספר, והידיים, וטבול יום, והאכלים והפלים שנטמאו במשקים:

The following disqualify *terumah*: One who eats foods with first degree uncleanness; Or one who eats food with second degree uncleanness; And who drinks unclean liquids. And the one who has immersed his head and the greater part of him in drawn water; And a clean person upon whose head and greater part of him there fell three logs of drawn water; And a scroll [of Holy Scriptures], And [unwashed] hands; And one that has had immersion that same day; And foods and vessels which have become defiled by liquids.

6. ירושלמי חגיגה ב:ה

משנה: נוטלין לידיים לחולין ולמעשר ולתרומה. ולקודש מטבילין. ולחטאת אם ניטמאו ידיי ניטמא גופו:
MISHNAH: One washes hands **The impurity of hands is rabbinic. Unless hands are consciously guarded from touching anything impure they are presumed to be impure in second*

degree and can be purified by having a quartarius (about 133 ml) of water poured over them. for profane food, tithe, and heave, but for *sancta* one immerses *The consumption of *sancta* requires not only a pure body, but if the eater's hands were not consciously guarded from touching anything impure after he immersed his whole body in a *miqweh*, at the time of the meal his hands have to be immersed again in a minimum of 40 seah (about 510 l) of water. And for the Red Cow if his hands became impure so became his body *Even if according to rabbinic rules the rabbinic impurity of his hands does not imply impurity of the body, for handling the ashes of the Red Cow or water containing such ashes he must be considered impure and therefore disqualified..

הלכה: ויש ידיים לחולין. אלא כרבי שמעון בן אלעזר. דרבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר. יש ידיים לחולין. דברי הכל היא. כדי שיהא בידל מן התרומה. תני רבי שמעון בן אלעזר משום רבי מאיר. הידים תחילה לחולין ושניות לתרומה. מה רבי שמעון בן אלעזר כרבי עקיבה. דתנינן תמן. המכניס ידיו לבית המנוגע ידיו תחילה דברי רבי עקיבה. וחכמים אומרים. ידיו שניות. כרבנן היא תמן. מה טעמון הכא. מתוך שאת אומר לו. ידיו שניות. אף הוא בידל מן התרומה. ולא מחמת משקה גזרו עליהן. ויהיו תחילה. (קול) [קל] וחומר. מה אם טבול יום שהוא דבר תורה אינו אלא פוסל. ידים שהן מדבריהן לא כל שכן. דבר אחר. כלום גזרו על הידים לא כדי שיהא בידל מן התרומה. מתוך שאת אומר לו. ידיו שניות. אף הוא בידל מן התרומה.

HALAKHAH: Is hand-washing required for profane food? But it must follow Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar, since Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar says, hand-washing is required for profane food. It is everybody's opinion, so he should separate from heave. Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar stated in the name of Rabbi Meir, hands are first degree impure for profane food and second degree impure for heave. Does Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar follow Rabbi Aqiba, as we have stated there, "if somebody puts his hands into a leprous house, his hands are impure in the first degree, the words of Rabbi Aqiba, but the Sages are saying, his hands are impure in the second degree"? There, it follows the rabbis; what is their reason here? Since you tell him that his hands are impure in the second degree, he will separate from heave. But did they not decide about them because of fluids; then they should be impure in the first degree? It is an argument *de minore ad majus*. Since the *Tevul Yom*, which is a word from the Torah, only disqualifies, impure hands, which are from their words, not so much more? Another explanation: Did they not decide about hands only that he should separate from heave? Since you tell him that his hands are impure in the second degree, he will separate from heave.

7. חולין קו.

אמר רב אידי בר אבין, אמר רב יצחק בר אשיאן: נטילת ידים לחולין, מפני סרך תרומה.
 § Rav Idi bar Avin says that Rav Yitzhak bar Ashiyan says: The obligation of washing hands before eating non-sacred food is due to an ancillary decree on account of *teruma*, the portion of produce designated for the priest, which must be consumed in a state of ritual purity. By rabbinic decree, one's hands are considered impure with second-degree ritual impurity, as they may have touched impure items. Therefore, they render *teruma* impure. Consequently, priests who partake of *teruma* are obligated to wash their hands first. The Sages therefore decreed that all must wash their hands even before eating non-sacred food, so that people not become accustomed to eating without washing their hands, which would in turn lead the priests to partake of *teruma* without washing their hands.

ועוד משום מצוה. מאי מצוה? אמר אביי: מצוה לשמוע דברי חכמים. רבא אמר: מצוה לשמוע דברי רבי אלעזר בן עזריה, דכתיב: "וכל אשר יגע בו הזב וידי לא שטף במים". אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: מכאן סמכו חכמים לנטילת ידיים מן התורה.

And the obligation is further due to its being a mitzva. The Gemara asks: What mitzva does it involve? Abaye says: It is a mitzva to listen to and obey the statements of the Sages, who instituted this washing of the hands. Rava says: It is a mitzva to listen to the statement of Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, as it is written with regard to a man who experiences a gonorrhea-like discharge [zav]: "And whomever he that has the issue touches, without having rinsed his hands in water," he contracts ritual impurity (Leviticus 15:11), and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh says: From here the Sages based washing of the hands upon a verse from the Torah.

אמר ליה רבא לרב נחמן: מאי משמע? דכתיב "וידי לא שטף במים", הא שטף – טהור? הא טבילה בעי! אלא הכי קאמר: ואחר שלא שטף – טמא.

Rava said to Rav Nahman: From where is this inferred? How can this verse, which concerns a zav, be interpreted as referring to washing the hands before a meal? Rava explains: As it is written: "Without having rinsed his hands in water." Consequently, one could infer that if he rinsed his hands the zav becomes ritually pure. But this cannot be correct, as verses elsewhere prove that a zav requires the immersion of his entire body. Rather, this is what the verse is saying: And there is another type of person who, if he has not rinsed his hands in water, is considered like one who is impure. The verse thereby serves as the basis for washing the hands.