

What's so bad about Tum'ah? Shavuot 7b

The Gemara discusses how significant the problem of טומאת מקדש וקדשיו (the impurity of the Temple and its sacraments) is. But why is it such a problem?

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1. שבועות א:ב-ד

כל שיש בה ידיעה בתחלה וידיעה בסוף והעלים בינתים, הרי זה בעולה ויורד. יש בה ידיעה בתחלה ואין בה ידיעה בסוף, שעיר שנעשה בפנים יום הכפורים תולה, עד שיודע לו ויביא בעולה ויורד:

The mishna returns to the subject of defiling the Temple or its sacrificial foods. It elaborates on which offerings atone for different cases of defiling the Temple or its sacrificial foods: In cases in which one had awareness, i.e., he knew he was ritually impure and was aware of the sanctity of the Temple or foods involved at the beginning, i.e., before he transgressed, and had awareness at the end, i.e., after the transgression, but had a lapse of awareness of one of those two components in between, while he actually transgressed, this person is liable to bring a sliding-scale offering. For cases in which one had awareness at the beginning, transgressed during a lapse of awareness, and still had no awareness at the end, the goat whose blood presentation is performed inside the Sanctuary on Yom Kippur, and Yom Kippur itself, suspend any punishment that he deserves until he becomes aware of his transgression; and then to achieve atonement he brings a sliding-scale offering.

אין בה ידיעה בתחלה אבל יש בה ידיעה בסוף, שעיר הנעשה בחוץ יום הכפורים מכפר, שנאמר (במדבר כט) מלבד חטאת הכפרים, על מה שזה מכפר, זה מכפר. מה הפנימי אין מכפר אלא על דבר שיש בו ידיעה, אף החיצון אין מכפר אלא על דבר שיש בו ידיעה:

For cases in which one did not have awareness at the beginning but had awareness at the end, the goat whose blood presentation is performed outside the Sanctuary, i.e., the goat of the additional offerings of Yom Kippur, and Yom Kippur itself, atone, as it is stated with regard to the offerings brought on Yom Kippur: "One goat for a sin-offering aside from the sin-offering of the atonements" (Numbers 29:11). The verse juxtaposes the internal and external goats together to teach that for that which this one atones, that one atones. Just as the internal goat, i.e., the one whose blood presentation is performed inside the Sanctuary, atones only for a case in which there was awareness of the components of the transgression at some point, i.e., at the beginning, so too, the external goat, i.e., the goat of the additional offerings of Yom Kippur, atones only for a case in which there was awareness at some point, i.e., at the end.

ועל שאין בה ידיעה לא בתחלה ולא בסוף, שעירי הרגלים ושעירי ראשי חדשים מכפרים, דברי רבי יהודה. רבי שמעון אומר, שעירי הרגלים מכפרין, אבל לא שעירי ראשי חדשים. ועל מה שעירי ראשי חדשים מכפרין, על הטהור שאכל את הטמא. רבי מאיר אומר, כל השעירים כפרתן שוה על טמאת מקדש וקדשיו. היה רבי שמעון אומר, שעירי ראשי חדשים מכפרין על הטהור שאכל את הטמא, ושל רגלים מכפרין על שאין בה ידיעה לא בתחלה ולא בסוף, ושל יום הכפורים מכפר על שאין בה ידיעה בתחלה אבל יש בה ידיעה בסוף. אמרו לו, מהו שיקרבו זה

בְּזֶה. אָמַר לָהֶם, יִקְרְבוּ. אָמְרוּ לוֹ, הוֹאִיל וְאֵין כְּפָרְתָן שָׁוָה, הֵיכָל קָרְבִּין זֶה בְּזֶה. אָמַר לָהֶן, כָּלן בְּאֵין לִכְפֹּר עַל טֻמְאַת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקִדְשֵׁיו:

And for cases in which one did not have awareness, neither at the beginning nor at the end, the goats brought as sin-offerings for the additional offerings of the Festivals and the goats brought as sin-offerings for the additional offerings of the New Moons atone. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda. Rabbi Shimon says: The goats of the Festivals atone for cases in which one never had awareness of the transgression, but the goats of the New Moons do not. But if so, for what do the goats of the New Moons atone? They atone for a ritually pure person who unwittingly partook of ritually impure sacrificial food. Rabbi Meir says: With regard to all the goats offered as additional offerings, those of the New Moons, Festivals, and Yom Kippur, their atonement, i.e., the atonement that they effect, is the same; they all atone for the defiling of the Temple by entering it while impure, or for the defiling of its sacrificial foods by partaking of them while impure. Rabbi Shimon would say, delineating his opinion as the mishna expresses it above: The goats of the New Moons atone for a ritually pure person who unwittingly partook of ritually impure sacrificial food. And with regard to the defiling of the Temple or its sacrificial foods, the goats of the Festivals atone for cases in which one did not have awareness, neither at the beginning nor at the end, and the goats of the additional offerings of Yom Kippur atone for cases in which one did not have awareness at the beginning but did have awareness at the end. The Rabbis said to him: What is the *halakha* with regard to whether goats consecrated for different days may be sacrificed, this one in place of that one? For example, if a goat was initially consecrated to be sacrificed as part of the Yom Kippur additional offerings, may it be sacrificed as part of the Festival additional offerings instead? Rabbi Shimon said to them: They may be sacrificed. They said to him: Since, according to you, their atonement is not the same, how could they possibly be sacrificed, this one in place of that one? Rabbi Shimon said to them: They can be interchanged, since ultimately all of them come to atone for the defiling of the Temple or its sacrificial foods.

2. שבועות ז:

יֵשׁ לִי בַעֲנִין זֶה לְהֵבִיא שְׁלֹשׁ טוֹמְאוֹת: טוֹמְאַת עֲבֹדָה זָרָה, וְטוֹמְאַת גִּילוי עֲרִיּוֹת, וְטוֹמְאַת שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים. With regard to this matter, i.e., the atonement effected by the sacrifice of the goat, I can state that this verse serves to amplify the atonement by teaching that the goat offering atones for the following three sins, which the Torah is referring to as impurities: The impurity of the sin of idol worship, and the impurity of engaging in forbidden sexual relations, and the impurity of perpetrating bloodshed.

בְּעֹבֶדָה זָרָה הוּא אוֹמֵר: "לִמְעַן טֻמֵּא אֶת מִקְדָּשִׁי"; בְּגִילוי עֲרִיּוֹת הוּא אוֹמֵר: "וַיִּשְׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת מִשְׁמֶרְתִּי לְבִלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת מַחֲקוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבֹת וְגו' וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם"; בְּשְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים הוּא אוֹמֵר: "וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ". יָכוֹל עַל שְׁלֹשׁ טוֹמְאוֹת הֵלְלוּ יְהִי שְׁעִיר מִכְפָּר? תִּלְמִיד לּוֹמֵר: "מִטְמְאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" – וְלֹא כָל טוֹמְאוֹת.

The *baraita* demonstrates that each of these sins is referred to as impurity: With regard to idol worship the verse states: "For he had given his offspring to Molekh in order to render impure My Sanctuary" (Leviticus 20:3). With regard to forbidden sexual relations the verse states: "You shall safeguard My charge not to do any of the abominable traditions that were done before you and not to render yourself impure through them" (Leviticus 18:30). With regard to bloodshed the

verse states: "The land will not atone for the blood that was spilled on it except through the blood of the one who spilled it; you shall not render the land impure" (Numbers 35:34). One might have thought that the goat offering would atone for these three types of impurities. To counter this, the verse states: "From the impurities of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 16:16). The restrictive term "from" indicates that it atones for some impurities but not for all impurities.

מָה מְצִינוּ שְׁחָלֵק הַכֶּתוּב מְכַלֵּל כָּל טוּמְאוֹת – הֵוֵי אוֹמֵר טוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי; אֶף כָּאן – בְּטוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי.
דְּבַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה.

The *baraita* derives the type of impurity for which the goat offering does atone: What do we find is the impurity that the verse differentiates from all other impurities? You must say that the verse is referring to the defiling of the Temple or its sacrificial foods. It is specifically for this transgression that the Torah provides one with the means of achieving atonement, i.e., by bringing a sliding-scale offering. So too here, since the verse limits the atonement of the goat offering to transgressions involving impurity, it is logical that it can also atone only for the defiling of the Temple or its sacrificial foods. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda.

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר: מִמְּקוֹמוֹ הוּא מוֹכָרֵ; הֵרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר: "וְכִפֹּר עַל הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִטְּמְאָת" – מִטְּמְאוֹת שֶׁל קוֹדֶשׁ.
Rabbi Shimon says: It is not necessary to derive which transgressions the goat offering atones for by comparing the verse written concerning it to a different verse. Rather, from its own place, i.e., from the verse about the atonement effected by the goat itself, it can be determined, as it states: "And he shall effect atonement upon the Sanctuary [*hakodesh*] from the impurities of the children of Israel," which should be interpreted as saying that it atones for the defiling of anything sacred [*kodesh*], i.e., the Temple or its sacrificial foods.

3. תוספתא שבועות א:א-ג

א:... הִיָּה ר"ש אוֹמֵר ל"ב שְׁעִירִים קָרִיבִין לַצִּבּוֹר בְּכָל שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה שְׁלִשִּׁים וְאַחַד בְּחוּץ וְנֹאכְלִין וְאַחַד בְּפָנִים וְאֵינוּ נֹאכֵל וְשֹׁעִיר הַמִּשְׁתַּלַּח. שְׁנִים עֶשֶׂר בִּי"ב חֲדָשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה שִׁבְעָה בַּפֶּסַח וּשְׁמוֹנָה בַּחֹג ב' בִּיּוֹה"כ א' בִּר"ה וּשְׁנִים בַּעֲצֵרֶת אֶחָד בְּגִלְלֵי לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים וְאַחַד בְּגִלְלֵי הַיּוֹם. וְאִם כֹּפֵר הָרֹאשׁוֹן עַל מֵה שְׁנֵי מִכְפָּר עַל הַטּוּמְאָה שֶׁאִירְעָה בֵּין זֶה לָזֶה וְאִמְרִין כִּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל צָרִיכִין לְהַבִּיא שְׁנֵי שְׁעִירִין בְּכָל יוֹם אֲלֵא שַׁחַס הַקֶּבֶ"ה עַל נִכְסֵין שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל.
...Rabbi Shimon would say: 32 goats are sacrificed for the community every year: 30* externally and are eaten, and one internally and is not eaten, and the scapegoat: 12 on the 12 beginnings of the month; 7 on Pesach; 8 on Sukkot; 2 on Yom Kippur; 1 on Rosh HaShanah; 2 on Shavuot - one for the bread and one for the day. And if the first has already atoned, for what does the second atone? For the *tum'ah* that happened between the two sacrifices. And we say: Israel should truly bring 2 goats each day, but God had mercy on the finances of Israel!

**emendation of the Hebrew text, which says 31*

ב: הִיָּה ר"ש אוֹמֵר קֶשֶׁה טוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי מִכָּל עֲבִירוֹת שִׁבְתוּרָה שְׁכָל עֲבִירוֹת שִׁבְתוּרָה מִתְּכַפְּרוֹת בְּשֹׁעִיר אֶחָד וְטוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי מִתְּכַפְּרֶת בִּל"ב שְׁעִירִין כָּל עֲבִירוֹת שִׁבְתוּרָה <מִתּוֹכָן> מִתְּכַפְּרוֹת פַּעַם אֶחָד בַּשָּׁנָה וְטוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי מִתְּכַפְּרֶת בְּכָל חֹדֶשׁ וְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנָאֵר (יִחְזַקְאֵל ה'י"א) לֵכֵן חֵי אֲנִי נֹאֵם ה' אֱלֹהִים אִם לֹא יֵעַן אֵת מִקְדָּשִׁי טְמֵאָת וְגו' קִשִּׁין הֵן שְׁקוּצִין וְתוֹעֵבוֹת שְׁעִית וְטוּמְאָת מִקְדָּשׁ וְקֹדֶשֶׁי קֶשֶׁה מְכֻלָּן.

R. Shimon would say: impurity of the Temple and its sacraments is more severe than all sins in the Torah; for all the sins in the Torah are atoned for through one goat, while the impurity of the Temple and its sacraments is atoned for each and every month, as is stated in Yechezkel 5:11: "Assuredly, as I live—said the Sovereign GOD—because you defiled My Sanctuary...": the disgusting things you did are severed, and the impurity of the Temple and its sacraments is more severe than all.

ג:מעשה בשני אחים כהנים שהיו שוין ורצין ועולין בכבש וקדם אחד מהם את חבריו לתוך ארבע אמות נטל אחד מהן את הסכין ותקע בלבו בא ר' צדוק ועמד על מעלות האולם בהר הבית ואמר שמעוני אחינו בית ישראל הרי הוא אומר (דברים כ"א:א') כי ימצא חלל באדמה וגו' אנו מהיכן נמוד מן ההיכל או מן העזרות געו כל ישראל בבכיה אחריו ואח"כ בא אביו של תינוק אמר להם אני כפרתכם מפרפר הוא בני וסכין לא נטמא מלמד שטומאת סכין היתה קשה עליהן משפיכות דמים וכן הוא אומר (מלכים ב כ"א:ט"ז) וגם דם נקי שפך מנשה מכאן אמרו בעון שפיכות דמים שכינה נעלית ובית המקדש מיטמא.

An incident occurred with two priestly brothers who were equal and were running up the ramp of the altar. One got ahead of the other, within 4 cubits of the altar, and the other one took out a knife and stabbed his brother in the heart. R. Zadok came and stood on the steps of the hallway on the Temple Mount. He said: Listen, my kin, the House of Israel, in Devarim 21:1 the Torah says: If a corpse is found on the ground, etc. From where should we measure? From the *hechal* or from the *azarot*? All of Israel cried after him.

And then the father of the boy(s) came and said: I am be your atonement. My son is still moving (i.e., not dead). This teaches that the impurity of the knife was more severe to them than the spilling of blood. Likewise, Scripture states in Melachim II, 21:16: "Moreover, Manasseh put so many innocent persons to death..." Based on this they said: For the sin of murder, the Divine Presence ascended, and the Temple was defiled/impurified.

[illegible]

In Egypt the hieroglyphs 'life' and 'happiness' flow from the purification flasks which purify the king. So also purification of the dead brings ritual purity and new life...at Delos, the sacred island of the Greeks, neither births nor deaths were permitted...The Hittites observed a longer period of impurity after the birth of a girl than a boy (four months vs. three months).

What are the sources of ritual impurity that are incompatible with the holiness of God? The three main sources of impurity are (1) corpses and certain animal carcasses, (2) *zara'at* – skin diseases in humans (a decomposition of the flesh associated with death; see Num. 12:12, Job 18:13) and fungal growths in fabrics and houses, and (3) genital discharges. Many scholars have noted that the physical substances and states labeled impure, and thus deemed to be anathema to God, are associated with death and procreation. The God of the Hebrew Bible does not die and does not have sexual relations. These are characteristic of humans. To be eligible to approach the sanctuary, God's residence among the Israelites, humans must separate from that which makes them least God-like: death and procreation. The ritual purity laws requiring separation from sources of impurity are thus essential to the frequent priestly exhortation to be like God (*imitatio dei*) and to strive for holiness...Three classes of heinous

moral transgression are singled out as sources of a moral impurity that defiles the land. These transgressions, which incur severe punishment, include various sexual sins, homicide, and idolatry.

6. Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed 3:47

...זאת תורת השם אשר נצטוו בה משה רבינו והתייחסה אליו, לא באה רק להקל העבודות והטורחים, וכל מה שאפשר שתדמה בקצתם שיש בו צער או טורח גדול, אינו רק מפני שאינך יודע המנהגים ההם והדעות הנמצאות בימים ההם, ראה ההפרש אשר בין שישרוף האדם את בנו לעבודת אלהיו, ובין שישרוף בן יונה לעבודת אלקינו...ועלו בידיו מאלה המשפטים תועלות גדולות ורבות, אחת מהן להתרחק מן הכיעור והמיאוס, והשניה שמירת המקדש, והשלישית לישא פנים למנהג המפורסם, כי היה מטורח הצאב"ה הגדול בענין הטומאה מה שתשמעו עתה, והרביעי להקל הטורח ההוא מעל האדם ושלא ימנעו ענין הטומאה והטהרה מעסק מעסקיו. כי זאת המצוה של טומאה וטהרה אינה נתלית רק במקדש וקדשיו לא בזולתם...והמפורסם מדעת הצאב"ה עד זמננו זה בארצות המזרח, ר"ל שארית המגורתי, שהנדה תהיה בבית בפני עצמה, וישרפו המקומות אשר תלך עליהם, ומי שמדבר עמה יטמא, ואפילו עם עבר רוח על הנדה ועל הטהור יטמא...

...The Torah of God that Moses our master was commanded and related to came only to lessen burdens. And anything that seems burdensome seems so only because you are unaware of the practices that existed in those days. See, for example, the difference between a person who would burn his child in fire in service of his pagan god versus a person who need only burn a dove for the service of our God...And these rules effected many useful goals – one, to avoid ugliness and disgust, a second to protect the Temple, a third to pay regard to common custom (as you will hear the great burdens of the Sabeans regarding defilement) and the fourth is to lighten the burden from upon a person so that ritual impurity does not prevent him/her from going about normal life: for this commandment of im/purity relates only to the Temple and its consecrated items, not to other things...Whereas still among the Sabeans in eastern lands, among the Magi, a menstruant woman must live solitarily, and they burn the ground where she walks, and one who speaks with her becomes impure, and even if a wind passes over her and someone pure, the latter becomes defiled....

...כבר בארנו שהכונה כולה היתה להתחדש בו התפעלות לבא אליו ושיירא ויפחד, כאמרו את מקדשי תיראו, וכל דבר נכבד כשיתמיד האדם לראותו יחסר מה שבנפש ממנו וימעט מה שהיה מגיע בגללו מן ההתפעלות, כבר העירו החכמים ז"ל על זה הענין ואמרו שאין טוב להכנס למקדש בכל עת שירצה, וסמכו זה לאמרו הָקֵר רִגְלְךָ מִבֵּית רַעֲךָ, ומפני שהיתה זאת הכונה, הזהיר השם יתברך הטמאים מהכנס למקדש עם רוב מיני הטומאות, עד שכמעט שלא תמצא אדם טהור רק מעטים...

...We have already explained that the intention regarding the Temple is to require renewed admiration to enter, and that one fear, like the verse, "Fear my Temple," and anything revered loses something when a person sees it all the time. The sages already commented on this and said that it is not good to visit the Temple anytime one wishes. And they connected this to the saying in Mishlei 25:17, "Visit your neighbor sparingly (lest he have too much of you and hate you)." And because this was the intention, God warned the impure not to enter the Temple with many types of impurities, to the extent that a person is only rarely pure...

7. Rambam (Maimonides) Laws of Ritual Baths 11:12

דבר ברור וגלוי שהטומאות והטהרות גזירות הכתוב הן ואינן מדברים שדעתו של אדם מכרעתו והרי הן מכלל החוקים וכן הטבילה מן הטומאות מכלל החוקים הוא שאין הטומאה טיט או צואה שתעבור במים אלא גזירת הכתוב היא והדבר תלוי בכוונת הלב

It is clear that im/purities are Scriptural decrees and are not something a person's mind can understand. And behold they are among the huqim. Likewise, immersion from impurity is among the huqim, for impurity is not dirt or excrement that comes off in water; rather it is Scriptural decree, and the matter depends on the heart's intent.

8. רמב"ן ויקרא יב:ד

והנכון בעיני, כי האשה בימי ראייתה תקרא נדה בעבור שינדוה וירחיקוה כל בני אדם, והאנשים והנשים ירחקו ממנה, ויושבת בדד לא תספר עם בני אדם כלל, כי גם דיבורה טמא אצלם, והעפר אשר תדרוך טמא להם כעפר רקב עצמות המת, והזכירו זה גם רבותינו, ואף מבט שלה מוליד היזק...וכן אמר הכתוב במצורע (להלן יג מו) בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו...כי הזכיר בו ישיבה שלא ילך כלל, כי ריחו והבלו מזיקים. ולכך אמר הכתוב בכאן כי גם שלשים ושלשת ימים תשב בדמי טהרה על מושבה אשר יושבה בימי נדות הלידה...

And I think that a menstruant woman is called niddah because people distance her and keep their distance from her, and she sits alone without conversing with others, for even her speech is impure to them. And the dust she walks upon is impure for them like the dirt of rotten bones of a corpse, and even our rabbis mentioned this, and even her gaze can cause damage...and likewise regarding the metzora Scripture states, "Alone he shall sit; outside the camp is his sitting place (Vayikra 13:46)."...it mentions sitting because he should not walk at all because his scent and his breath damage. And therefore, Scripture says here that for 33 days she shall sit in the blood of tahara in the same place she sat during the niddah period following birth...

9. ר' יהודה הלוי, ספר הכוזרי מאמר ב' פסקא ס

ס. **אמר החבר:** כבר אמרתי לך שאין ערך בין שכלנו ובין העניין האלוקי, וראוי שלא נטרח לבקש עילת אלה הגדולות והדומה לזה. אבל אני אומר אחר בקשת המחילה מבלתי שאגזור שהוא כן, שאפשר שתהיה הצרעת והזיבות תלויות בטומאת המת, כי המות הוא ההפסד הגדול, והאבר המצורע כמת והזרע הנפסד כן, מפני שהיה בעל רוח טבעי מוכן להיות טיפה שיהיה ממנה אנוש, והפסדו כנגד כוח החיות והרוח, ואיננו משיג בהפסד הזה לרב דקותו אלא בעלי הרוחות הדקות והנפשות החשובות, המשתדלות להידבק בא-לוהות והנבואה או בחלומות האמיתיות והמראות הברורות...

I have already told you that our intellects are not comparable to that of the Divinity, and it is proper not to make any attempt to find a reason for these lofty concepts or anything similar to them. But after I ask for forgiveness and disclaim that this is surely the reason, I will say that tzara'at and abnormal discharges are related to the spiritual impurity related to death. Death is the absolute spiritual deficiency, and a limb afflicted with tzara'at is like a corpse in this respect. Similarly, an abnormal discharge also represents death, in that the discharged material had a certain life-force, which gave it the ability to become an embryo that would eventually develop into a human being. The loss of this material, then, is in opposition to the property of life and the spirit of life. Because this spiritual deficiency is very ethereal, it can be detected only by people with refined spirits and significant souls, who strive to attach themselves to Divinity... Most of us feel different when we come close to the dead or to a cemetery, and our spirits become

confused for a while when we enter a house where a dead person has been. Only one whose nature is coarse will not be able to detect any of this.