

The Zayin Mashkin

There is a well-known *halachic* concept called the *zayin mashkin*, or the seven liquids. Briefly, this refers to the idea that once a food has come in contact with one of seven specific liquids, that food is now susceptible to becoming *tamei*. Although this issue had many more practical ramifications during the era of the *Beis Hamikdash*, it is still quite relevant nowadays.

We will see that there is a *pasuk* in this week's *parsha* that is used as a source for one of the seven liquids. That being the case, we will focus our discussion on this interesting concept, to try to understand it better and see how it affects us.

The Tumah of Sheratzim

Before speaking about the *zayin mashkin*, let us begin our discussion with the basic *halachah* as it appears in the Torah. In *Parshas Shmini* (chap. 11), the Torah outlines many *halachos* relating to *tumah*. Specifically, the Torah discusses the *halachos* relevant to the *shemonah sheratzim*, the eight creatures that “creep” on the ground. The carcasses of these animals generate *tumah* that can affect both utensils and food. The Torah, in two separate *pesukim*, limits the effects of the *tumah* on food only to foods which have come in contact with water:

- 1) “Of any food that is edible, upon which water comes, shall become impure; and any liquid that can be drunk in any vessel shall become impure” (*Vayikra* 11:34).
- 2) “And if its carcass will fall upon any seeds of a seeding that has been planted, it is pure. But if water shall have been placed upon a seed and then their carcass falls upon it, it is impure to you” (*ibid.* 37-38).

The reason why the Torah finds it necessary to mention this idea twice is because it is dealing with two types of *tumah*. The first *pasuk* speaks of a situation where the food is located in a pottery vessel that has become *tamei* from a *sheretz* (singular form of *sheratzim*), while the second *pasuk* deals with where the dead *sheretz* comes directly in contact with the food. When the *sheretz* falls on to the plant while it is still attached to the ground, the plant does not become *tamei*. However, once it has been disconnected from the ground and comes in contact with water, it can then become *tamei*.

The fact that the food becomes susceptible to *tumah* after coming into contact with one of the *zayin mashkin* only *after* it has become detached is obvious. This is because every food that grows from the ground comes into contact with water during its growth. Thus, if the *halachah* would be that the food becomes susceptible regardless of whether it is attached or not, then all food would be automatically susceptible and the Torah would not find it necessary to tell us this (*Rashi, Vayikra* 37:34; *Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Ochlin* 12:1).

Other *Tumah* as Well

The fact that food becomes susceptible to *tumah* after having come in contact with water is not limited to the *tumah* generated by *sheratzim*, but includes other types of *tumah* as well, such as *tumas meis*, the *tumah* generated by a corpse (*Chullin* 36a-b and Rashi ad loc.).

The Liquids

Based on the simple meaning of the *pesukim* above, it would seem that the only liquid that can make food susceptible to *tumah* is water. However, *Chazal* had a tradition that enabled them to understand the *pasuk* differently. Let us reexamine the *pasuk*:

“Of any food that is edible, upon which water comes, shall become impure; and any liquid (*mashkeh*) that can be drunk in any vessel shall become impure” (*Vayikra* 11:34).

On the simple level, this *pasuk* is instructing us:

- 1) Food that has come in contact with water can become *tamei*.
- 2) Liquids can become *tamei*.

However, *Chazal* expounded and read the *pasuk* as follows: “Of any food that is edible, upon which water and any liquid that can be drunk in any vessel comes, shall become impure” (*Toras Kohanim*; *Rashi*, *Vayikra* 11:34; *Gur Aryeh* ad loc.). By reading the *pasuk* in this manner, not only does water make food susceptible to becoming *tamei*, but any *mashkeh*, or liquid, can as well.

What is a *mashkeh*?

The *Mishnah* (*Machshirin* 6:4) states: “The seven liquids are: Dew, water, wine, [olive] oil, blood, milk and bee honey.” The point of the *Mishnah* is to tell us that once a food has become detached from the ground, these liquids can make the food susceptible to becoming *tamei*. The action of the food coming in contact with a liquid and thereby becoming susceptible to becoming *tamei* is called *hechsher*, which means “fitting” or “proper” [see *Tehillim* 68:7 and *Rashi* ad loc.] (*Rambam*, *Hilchos Tumas Ochlin* 1:1-2).

Not All Liquids

We have seen that there are seven specific liquids that can make food susceptible to becoming *tamei*. What is unique about these seven? Why are not fruit juices included? In order to answer these questions, let us examine a passage in *Toras Kohanim* (*Parshas Shmini*):

“‘Upon which water comes’ – This indicates only water. From where do I know dew, wine, oil, blood, honey and milk? The *pasuk* states: ‘And any liquid.’ If ‘any liquid’ is included, it might be thought to include berry juice, fruit juice, pomegranate juice and all other fruits? The *pasuk* states: ‘Water.’ Just as water is unique, as it does not have a modifying name, similarly, we will include only dew, wine, oil, blood, honey and milk that do not have a modifying name. And we will exclude berry juice, pomegranate juice and other types of fruit juice that have a modifying name.”

We thus see from this passage that the *zayin mashkin* are limited to those listed in the *Mishnah* above, while other liquids are excluded.

It should be noted that the *Rambam*, in his commentary to the *Mishnah* (*Machshirin* 6:4) raises an obvious question. In order for a liquid to be classified as one of the *zayin mashkin*, it

cannot have a modifying name. Yet, one of the liquids is bee honey. If so, why is honey included? The *Rambam* points out that bee honey is called simply “honey,” and does not need an modifier. In other words, if one comes across the term “honey” without any elaboration, he assumes it means bee honey. Here, because of the importance of the *halachah*, it was necessary to specify “bee” honey in order that one does not make a mistake and confuse it with hornet honey.

Although, as we have seen, the *Toras Kohanim* derives from the *pasuk* that there are other liquids included in “*mashkeh*,” the *Tosefta* (*Shabbos*, chap. 9) goes further and cites *pesukim* to prove that each of the additional six are referred to as *mashkeh*, or something that is drunk:

- 1) Blood – “And drinks the blood of the slain” (*Bamidbar* 23:24).
- 2) Wine – “And you would drink blood of grapes like delicious wine” (*Devarim* 32:14).
- 3) Honey – “He would suckle him with honey from a stone” (ibid. 13).
- 4) Oil – “A drinking feast of oils” (*Yeshayah* 25:6).
- 5) Milk – “She opened a skin of milk and gave him to drink” (*Shoftim* 4:14).
- 6) Dew – “He arose the next morning and squeezed the fleece. He pressed dew from the fleece a full bowl of water” (ibid. 6:38).

Netilas Yadayim

Everyone is familiar with the concept of *netilas yadayim*, washing hands, in preparation for eating bread. However people are less familiar with the concept of washing hands before eating wet food, with the exception of *karpas* on the *Seder* night. In order to properly understand this topic, we first must discuss why we wash our hands for bread.

During the era of the *Beis Hamikdash*, when we had the ashes of the *parah adumah*, the red heifer, we were able to purify ourselves from the *tumah* generated by a corpse. Then the *kohanim* were allowed to eat *terumah*, one of the portions awarded to them by the Torah. Aside from *tumas meis*, the *kohanim* had to be careful not to become contaminated by other forms of *tumah* as well. One such *tumah* is that of “*stam yadayim*.” This phrase means “unspecified hands,” and refers to a situation where a person has not been particularly careful concerning what his hands have touched. If a person touches *terumah* with *stam yadayim*, he has invalidated the *terumah* and it can no longer be eaten. Thus it was necessary for a *kohen* partaking of *terumah* to wash his hands in order to assure that his hands were completely *tahor*.

Chazal instituted that every person throughout the generations must wash their hands before eating bread, even though we are no longer concerned about *tumah* and *taharah*. This is in order that, when we will merit the rebuilding of *Beis Hamikdash* and the *kohanim* will once again be able to eat *terumah*, they will be accustomed to washing their hands before eating (*Chullin* 106a).

Another reason for washing one’s hands before a bread meal is derived from a *pasuk*. The *pasuk* states: “For I am *Hashem*, your G-d, and you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy” (*Vayikra* 11:44). The *Gemara* (*Brachos* 53b) derives from the phrase, “and you shall sanctify yourselves” that this is a reference to “*mayim rishonim*,” the water used to wash one’s hands before the meal. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Orach Chayim* 158:2), based on other passages in the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim*, explains that “sanctity” refers to cleanliness.

Therefore, when the Torah tells us to “sanctify ourselves,” it is instructing us to wash our hands before eating.

It is important to point out that when *Chazal* instituted *netilas yadayim*, they did so only for a bread meal. This is because a bread meal is viewed as something set or regular, while an eating session without bread is considered incidental. Furthermore, when a person partakes of a bread meal and is therefore required to recite the lengthy *bracha achronah* of *birkas hamazon*, his involvement in sanctified matters is something readily recognizable and thus *netilas yadayim* is required. On the other hand, when he eats a meal without bread and is required to recite only a short *bracha acharonah*, his taking part in holy matters is less discernable (*Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim* 158:3).

Davar Shetibulo Bamashkeh

Now that we have seen the basis for washing hands before eating bread, we can examine the discussion germane to washing hands for foods dipped into a liquid. (Please note: When we speak of food “dipped” into a liquid, this refers to food that comes in contact with a liquid, whether the food was dipped into it, or the liquid was poured over the food.) The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 115a) states: “Anything that has been dipped into a liquid requires *netilas yadayim*.” There is a disagreement among the *Rishonim* as to how to understand this rule:

1) Some *Rishonim* maintain that the reason for this rule is identical to the first explanation we discussed concerning *netilas yadayim* for bread. If a person were to touch the liquid on the produce, this would cause the food to become *tamei*. Therefore, in order to make sure that the *kohanim* are prepared to eat *terumah* in the proper manner, we would require *netilas yadayim* for eating foods that are wet. According to this view, the *bracha* of *al netilas yadayim* is required when washing for wet produce, similar to washing for a bread meal (*Rabbeinu Yonah, Brachos* 41a, s.v. *kol shetibulo*; *Tur Orach Chayim* 158 and 473; see *Beis Yosef Orach Chayim* 158:4).

2) Other *Rishonim* argue that the *Gemara*’s requirement to wash one’s hands before eating wet food has nothing to do with the *tumah* or *taharah* of the food itself. Rather, the concern is that if someone touches the liquid with *stam yadayim*, unwashed hands, the *liquid* becomes *tamei*. If he were to then drink that liquid, he would become *tamei* and disqualify himself from eating *terumah*. Since we are in any event all *tamei meis*, this issue does not concern us and is only relevant during the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*. Thus, according to this opinion, a person washing before eating wet produce would not recite a *bracha* over the *netilah* (*Tosafos, Pesachim* 115a, s.v. *kol shetibulo*; *Maharam MiRotenberg* and *Baal Ha’itur*, cited by *Tur Orach Chayim* 473).

The Practical *Halachah*

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 158:4) rules like the majority of the *Rishonim*, that one should wash his hands prior to eating wet food. However, in deference to the *Rishonim* who maintain that no *bracha* is recited in this case, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules as well that one washes without a *bracha* (see *Beis Yosef*, ad loc.)

Although this is the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the later authorities are divided. Many maintain that the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* must be upheld scrupulously (Vilna Gaon [who maintains that a *bracha* is required]; *Taz, Orach Chayim* 473:6; *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 158:3; *Mishnah Berurah* 158:11).

On the other hand, many *Acharonim* mention the fact that people are not accustomed to washing their hands before eating wet food, with the justification that they are relying on those *Rishonim* who rule that this is required only during times when people are particular about *tumah* and *taharah* (*Magen Avraham* 158:8; *Aruch Hashulchan* 158:4; *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 158:3).

Apparently the custom of not washing for wet food was so entrenched, that one of the commentators to the *Shulchan Aruch* found it necessary to explain that the reason we wash our hands before *karpas* on the *Seder* night is because it is one of the many unusual practices we do on that night in order to encourage the children to ask questions (*Chok Yaakov* 473:28).

Eating Karpas Correctly

As long as we are discussing the topic of wet food and we mentioned *karpas*, I wish to point out a common mistake that many unwittingly make. As we have seen, the reason, according to some *Rishonim*, that we wash before eating wet food is in order that our hands do not make the food *tamei*. For many people, the only time of the year when this is practiced is on the *Seder* night before eating the *karpas* vegetable, which is dipped in salt water or vinegar. It should be noted that one is required to wash his hands before eating wet food only when he is planning on eating it with his bare hands. If he uses a fork to hold the dipped food, there is no concern about causing the food to become *tamei* and no washing is required. Therefore, according to this, one should specifically dip and eat the *karpas* while holding it in his fingers.

Waterless Dough

There are two more practical applications to the *zayin mashkin* and they both relate to the *mitzvah* of separating *challah*. Everyone is familiar with the concept that under certain circumstances, one is obligated to separate a piece of dough from a bread or cake dough and declare it *challah*. When we were ritually pure, the *mitzvah* was to give this dough to a *kohen*. However, now that we are all *tamei*, we either burn the piece of dough or wrap it up and throw it away.

There are many factors involved in creating the obligation of separating *challah*. For example, there has to be a certain minimal amount of flour and that flour has to come from one of the five types of grain: wheat, barley, spelt, rye or oats. The question that we are going to address is what type of liquid must be included in the dough in order to create the obligation of *challah*.

There is a disagreement among the *Rishonim* whether dough that does not contain any of the *zayin mashkin*: water, wine, olive oil, or honey, and instead is mixed with eggs or pure fruit juice, it is obligated in *challah* (see *Tur*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 329:9 and *Beis Yosef* ad loc.). The *Shulchan Aruch* (ibid.) rules that such a dough is obligated in *challah*. It would seem that that since he does not mention otherwise, the *Shulchan Aruch* holds that one would also recite a *bracha* when separating *challah* from such a dough. However, several *Acharonim* rule that, due to the fact that some *Rishonim* maintain that such a dough is exempt from *challah*, no *bracha* should be recited when separating the *challah* unless one adds one of the *zayin mashkin* to the mixture (*Bach*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 369; *Shach*, ad loc. #9).

The Case of the *Challah Tahorah*

Another practical application concerning the *zayin mashkin* and *challah* has to do with a point we discussed at the beginning of the article. We mentioned that when food comes in contact with one of the *zayin mashkin*, from hence forth it is susceptible to becoming *tamei*. Food that never came in contact with any of the *zayin mashkin* will always remain *tahor*.

Nowadays, when separating *challah* from dough, since the flour was mixed with water, the dough is *tamei*, which in turn makes the *challah tamei'ah*. It is therefore forbidden to be consumed by a *kohen* and it must be destroyed. However, if someone makes a dough without any of the *zayin mashkin*, and instead uses eggs or pure fruit juice, this dough is incapable of contracting *tumah*, and the *challah* separated from it is *tahorah*. This presents a problem, because it is forbidden to destroy *challah tahorah*. For this reason, the *poskim* recommend that one should not make a dough that contains only pure fruit juice, but one of the *zayin mashkin* should be added (*Mishnah Berurah* 462:20).

In the previous paragraph, I wrote that “*in theory* this dough *might* be incapable of contracting *tumah*.” The reason why I expressed myself in such a manner is because if the wheat was washed prior to being ground into flour, as is usually the case (with the exception of wheat used for *Pesach matzos*), the wheat, and therefore the flour and dough are susceptible to becoming *tamei*.

Egg Matzos

The issue of having a dough that is not susceptible to becoming *tamei* is relevant to the production of egg *matzos*. Egg *matzos*, especially those prepared for use on *Pesach* (according to *Ashkenazim*, for the elderly and the sick), are made from flour ground from unwashed wheat and a liquid other than water. It is made from either eggs, grape juice or pure fruit juice. When grape juice is used, the dough is susceptible to becoming *tamei*, as this is one of the *zayin mashkin*. However, eggs or pure fruit juice do not accomplish this. In this case, the *challah* separated will be *tahorah*, so the question is what is done with it.

I was in contact with several experts in the *kashrus* field and was told that one of the solutions to this issue is that they have a box of *matzos* stored away from which *challah* was never taken. Then, whenever an egg *matzah* dough is prepared in the factory, the *mashgiach* designates a minimal amount of *challah* for that dough in the box of designated *matzos*. This practice is based on the ruling of the *Shach* (*Yoreh Dei'ah* 369:9) and the ruling of Rav Yisrael Belsky.

Conclusion

For various reasons, people tend to shy away from learning the *halachos* that relate to *tumah* and *taharah*. This can be due to unfamiliarity of the concepts or because of the feeling that since it is no longer relevant, we do not need to learn it. This is quite unfortunate because we must realize that these *halachos* are also a part of *Hashem's* Torah and we can attain closeness to Him by learning these *halachos* in the same manner that we do when we learn something easier and more familiar. Indeed, if we keep in mind the words of the last *Mishnah* in *Avos*, “According to the pain is the reward,” we will come to the realization that we have more to gain when learning more difficult topics of Torah.