

OVERVIEW of the Daf

1) Me'ilah (cont.)

The Gemara concludes its challenge to R' Ashi's explanation why the halachos of me'ilah are like mountains suspended by a hair.

After another failed explanation, the Gemara returns to the explanation previously presented by Rava.

2) Few verses but numerous laws

A Baraisa declares that halachos of נגעים and אהלות have few verses but numerous laws associated with them.

The assertion that נגעים has few verses is challenged and R' Pappa adjusts the Baraisa to reflect this.

The significance of this knowledge is that one who has a doubt about נגעים should look in the verses but one who has a doubt about אהלות should look in the Mishnayos.

3) Clarifying the Mishnah

The language of the Mishnah that implies that monetary laws, the laws of the korbanos, the laws of purification, the laws of tumah and the laws of illicit relationships are supported by verses, rather than being implicit is challenged.

The Gemara identifies a case in each category that is not explicit.

The Gemara clarifies that all the categories of law mentioned in the Mishnah are fundamentals of the Torah.

הדרן עלך הכל חייבין

4) MISHNAH: The Mishnah begins by placing a limit on the number of students that may be taught different topics of Torah. The Mishnah identifies four inappropriate inquiries and the punishment for one who acts disrespectfully towards Hashem.

5) Clarifying the Mishnah

The Gemara clarifies the language of the Mishnah concerning expounding on the Maaseh Merkavah.

The Gemara struggles until it finally offers an accepted explanation why it is forbidden to expound upon the laws of illicit relations with three students.

A Baraisa is cited that provides the source for the Mishnah's restriction against expounding on Ma'aseh Bereishis with two students. ■

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HALACHAH Highlight

The secret of the Mikveh waters

מים שכל גופו עולה בהן וכו' ברום שלש אמות וכו' ושיערו חכמים מי מקוה ארבעים סאה

Sefer החיים (1:21) writes that the volume of water which makes up a mikveh corresponds to various symbolic concepts. The Gemara (Berachos 16a) teaches that just as a flowing brook transforms a person from being impure to becoming pure, so, too, does the Torah have the ability to purify a person. Water has an effect upon the entire person when he can become fully immersed in it. So it is with Torah. When a person toils in Torah, it effects his entire being. Our Gemara states that the dimensions of a mikveh include a height of three amos, which corresponds to the three elements of a person—the soul (נפש), the spirit (רוח), and the neshama (נשמה). This represents how one's actions, speech and thoughts should be immersed in Torah, and then it will have the effect of purifying his soul. As this happens, the higher worlds, which correspond to a person's upright stance, are also elevated and purified.

Even with this being said, and with one's being aware of the sublime power of his Torah study, a person should gear his involvement in Torah for the sake of heaven, and that the benefits of his efforts be for the universal good, and not for his own spiritual advancement alone.

Yalkut Gershuni explains that when our Gemara states that a person's entire body is immersed in a mikveh, it uses the terminology "מים שכל גופו עולה בהן." The word "עולה" can indicate that the person becomes blended into the water and nullified within it. We find a parallel usage of this word in the Mishnah (Terumos 4:7): "Teruma [which falls into

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REVIEW and Remember

1. Why is it important to know whether an area of halacha has many pesukim that discuss that topic?
2. Which laws of purification are not explicit?
3. Why are the laws of illicit relations not taught to three students?
4. What is the difference between the yetzer hara for theft and the yetzer hara for illicit relations?

Distinctive INSIGHT

A square mikvah

מים שכל גופו עולה בהן וכמה הן אמה על אמה ברום שלש אמות
 [One must immerse in] water that covers his entire body. How much
 is that? [The volume of water that is contained in] an amah by an
 amah by a height of three amos.

Tosafos¹ writes that the reason the width of the mikvah is an amah, even though a person is smaller than an amah, is so that a person should be able to immerse without having to hold his arms tightly against his body. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch² wondered why, if Tosafos is correct, did Chazal give a square measurement for the minimum size of a mikveh, i.e. 1x1x3 amos; seemingly if the mikveh was round and the diameter of the circle was an amah it would be sufficient. One of the answers he suggests is based on Tosafos³ who writes that the reason the height of the mikveh is three amos, even though people are taller than three amos, is that when people immerse they bow their heads down. Accordingly, it could be suggested that Chazal understood that one of the factors that will cause the person to be completely submerged is that when he lowers his head the water level will rise and if the mikveh were round rather than square the water would not rise sufficiently to cover his head.

The Maharsham⁴ was asked, based on the comments of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, whether a community could construct

(Insight. Continued from page 1)

regular grain] is עולה/ blended out and nullified if outnumbered by one hundred and one parts.” The Yerushalmi (Terumos 10:8) teaches that a בריה—an entire creature, can become nullified when it falls into a volume of 960 parts. Forty se’ah of water comprises 960 kav. When a person immerses himself in a mikveh, he becomes nullified within the water, and is then able to emerge as a purified, refreshed and new entity. ■

a round mikvah. Maharsham wrote that it is clear from Rambam’s commentary to the Mishnah⁵ that any shaped mikveh is acceptable as long as it contains the requisite amount of water. Nevertheless, the common custom to construct a square mikveh is based on the writings of the Shelah⁶ who wrote, based on kabbalistic principles, that a mikveh should be shaped like an “end mem” – “ם”. Therefore, when dealing with matters that relate to spiritual purity one should incorporate kabbalistic principles even if we cannot explain these principles based on sources in the revealed Torah. However, if there is a circumstance where it is not possible to construct the mikveh in the shape of a square, the mikveh may be constructed in other shapes, even round. ■

1. תוס' ד"ה אמה.
2. לחם ושמלה ס"י ר"א סק"ג.
3. תוס' ד"ה ברום.
4. שו"ת מהרש"ם ח"ד ס"י קי"ד.
5. פירוש למשניות אהלולת פ"ג מ"ז.
6. שלי"ה שער האותיות אות ק. ■

STORIES Off the Daf

Learning Kabbalah

“...ולא במעשה מרכבה ביחיד אלא אם כן היה
 חכם ומבין מדעתו...”

Our Mishnah states that one should not teach Ma’aseh Merkavah, advanced Kabbalah, even to a single student unless he has already proven his wisdom and ability to grasp the subject matter independently.

Someone once saw Rav Shlomo Bloch, zt”l, learning the Zohar Hakadosh on Shabbos. He asked, “Isn’t this in the category of Ma’aseh Merkavah?”

The “Tzaddik Reb Shlomo” answered, “Actually, my Rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim, zt”l, would learn the Zohar Hakadosh on Shabbos and encouraged others to do so as well. He would even tell bo-

churim to learn through the Zohar on the parsha. He would say, ‘Most of the Zohar is like Midrash.’” It was also known that the Chofetz Chaim, zt”l, felt that learning Zohar brings one to Yiras Shomayim.

The author of the Leshem Sh’vo V’Achlamah, zt”l, once confessed that, although he never met Rav Yisroel Salanter, zt”l, when he was a young man, he had always wanted to develop a relationship with the great Baal Mussar. What prevented him was his fear that Rav Yisroel would have tried to prevent him from spending the majority of his time studying נסתר rather than נגלה.

Someone conveyed this to Rav Yisroel, who expressed some surprise at the younger man’s reservations. “On the contrary,” he said, “It never occurred to me to discourage a person from following the unique path he has chosen to come clos-

er to Hashem!”

Despite this, the two never did meet. Soon afterward, Rav Yisroel traveled abroad to do outreach. However, another scholar did actually ask Rav Yisroel why he didn’t instruct his students to study Kabbalah to help them come closer to Hashem.

The Gadol responded, “What practical difference does it make in which heavenly chamber Hashem sits? All I know is that those who fail to come closer to Him will be punished severely, so I must put all my efforts into coming closer to Him!”

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, zt”l, commented on this story, “Rav Yisroel definitely learned Kabbalah, but the questioner was a young man. Rav Yisroel wanted to hint to him that the main thing is not knowledge of the higher spheres, but pure fear of heaven!” ■

