



Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Matos | Sichah 2

The Context:

After the Jewish people defeated the Midianites and recovered the spoils of war, G-d instructed them in the process of purifying the Midianite utensils.

Any metal utensils that were used to cook forbidden foods with fire had to be purged in fire. The fire would expunge the forbidden taste. This process is called *hagalah*. Following that, those vessels had to be immersed in water. Any vessels not used with fire, but only for cold liquids and foods, must also be immersed in water. This is called *tevilah*. (*Bamidbar* 20:22-23)

The Ramban:

Ramban asks why this command was not given to the Jewish people following their defeat of Sichon and Og which occurred earlier. (*Devarim* 2:35) He answers that because the territory of Sichon and Og was part of the Land of Israel, an exception was made and their utensils were permitted, no matter what kind of forbidden food was absorbed in them.

The Question:

Ramban's explanation works for the command to purge vessels that absorbed forbidden food with fire. The forbidden taste absorbed in the vessels of Sichon and Og were exempted from purging because of the sanctity of the land. But the obligation to immerse utensils that belonged to gentiles applies to vessels that did not absorb forbidden taste at all. Seemingly, that law should have been commanded earlier, after the battle with Sichon and Og?

The Preface to the Explanation:

In his comments to this episode, Rashi describes the obligation to immerse vessels as follows:

“According to its **simple** meaning, this sprinkling was to cleanse it from contamination by a corpse. He said to them, “The vessels require purging to cleanse them from the absorption of forbidden food, and sprinkling to cleanse them of spiritual uncleanness [caused by a corpse].” **Our Rabbis expounded from here** that even to make them fit for use after contamination from forbidden food, ritual immersion was required for metal utensils.” (*Rashi to Bamidbar 20:23*)

This means that immersing vessels in water is part of the process of making vessels “fit for use after contamination from forbidden food.” But if this is the case, why do newly acquired vessels from gentiles require immersion? They have not absorbed any forbidden food!

Rashi’s intention can be understood from his precise language. Utensils used with fire need to be **purged** of their forbidden food. But utensils that never absorbed hot food, either because they are new, or because they were only used with cold food, need to be immersed to “**make them fit for use.**” The immersion does not actually remove any forbidden taste. But because the utensil belonged to a gentile, it could, theoretically, be used for forbidden food at any moment. The utensil is therefore “potentially impure.” For a Jew to take possession of such a utensil, he must first purify it of this forbidden potential. This is the purpose of immersing the vessel, not to purge it of forbidden taste, but to “make them fit for use” by a Jew.

The Explanation:

Thus, Ramban’s explanation for why the Jewish people did not have to purge the utensils they recovered from Sichon and Og applies to the obligation to immerse as well. Immersion is also a consequence of forbidden food, not the actual absorption, but of potential forbidden use. Because the forbidden status of those vessels was categorically lifted, there was no obligation to immerse them to remove the potential, or to purge them to remove the actual, forbidden absorption.

Settling Other Questions:

This explains two other potential issues:

- 1) When we sell our chametz utensils to the gentile before Pesach, why do we not have to immerse them after Pesach? Seemingly, they are coming into our possession from a gentile?
- 2) Before Sinai the Jewish people has the status of gentiles (Bnei Noach) and after Sinai they became Jews. Why did they not have to immerse their utensils before use?

Based on the above, we can explain:

- 1) It is highly unlikely that a gentile will actually use the utensils sold to him. That assumption is implicit in the sale. There is no “potential” for forbidden absorption, and therefore, no obligation to immerse.
- 2) Prior to Sinai, the Jewish people observed the laws of meat and milk to the best of their ability. Therefore, there was no “potential” for forbidden taste to be absorbed in their utensils.