



Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Metzora | Sichah 2

The Verse:

A man who experiences an unusual discharge is rendered ritually impure and conveys impurity to people, objects, and utensils that come into contact with him. Once his discharge ceases, he is to count seven clean days and immerse in a *mikvah*. Then, he reverts to a ritually pure state. A man with this impurity is called a *zav*.

Concerning a *zav*, the Torah says: “An earthenware utensil which the *zav* will touch shall be broken, and any wooden utensil shall be rinsed in water.” (*Vayikra* 15:12)

The Rashi:

An earthenware utensil which the zav will touch — One might think that even if he touches the outside of the utensil, “it will also become impure...” as is taught in *Toras Kohanim* (15:143) which concludes, “What form of touching is considered as if he touched the whole utensil? When he moves it.” [Meaning, if a *zav* moves an earthenware utensil, it becomes impure].

The Reasonable Explanation:

Rashi seems to be addressing this question: Our verse implies that a *zav* can defile an earthenware utensil through simply touching its outer surface. But previously, in *parshas Shemini*, we learned that an impure insect could only defile an earthenware utensil if it entered its interior space. (*Vayikra* 11:33) Rashi reasoned that the reader may distinguish between an impure insect, which is a lesser level of impurity and a *zav*, which is a more severe form of impurity. Perhaps an insect cannot defile an earthenware utensil

through contact with its surface, but a *zav* can convey impurity through such contact.

To dispel this assumption, Rashi cites *Toras Kohanim*, which raises the same possibility — “One might think that even if he touches the outside of the utensil it will also become impure” — and then Rashi refers the reader to the continuation of the *Toras Kohanim*. In that continuation, *Toras Kohanim* employs a *gezeirah shavah* — a method of Talmudic logic that uses analogous words in different verses to apply law from one context to another — to prove that the meaning of “touch” here does not mean contact with the outside surface of the earthenware utensil.

But, then, what is the meaning of “touch” in this verse? Rashi therefore cites the conclusion of *Toras Kohanim*: “What form of touching is considered as if he touched the whole utensil? When he moves it.” Touching the surface of an earthenware utensil does not contaminate it, but moving it does.

The Question:

Rashi — who aims to explain the straightforward meaning of Scripture as lucidly as possible — always supplies all the information necessary to understand the verse. He would never withhold an integral part of his argument on the assumption that the reader would research it independently. In this commentary, Rashi does not quote *Toras Kohanim*'s refutation of the assumption that the word “touch” refers to touching the outside surface of the utensil. He only alludes to it by saying, “as is taught in *Toras Kohanim*.” It must be, then, that Rashi does not rely on the *gezeirah shavah* in *Toras Kohanim* to elucidate the meaning of “touch,” but rather, his proof lies somewhere in the words he selected to quote from *Toras Kohanim*.

The Explanation:

In the straightforward understanding of Scripture, a seemingly repetitive verse does not pose a problem so long as it introduces some novel law or

idea. If a verse offers nothing novel, then its repetitiveness must be addressed.

Our verse seems to be superfluous, because the law it introduces is self-evident and obvious. Previously the Torah taught that a *zav* conveys impurity to people who touch him, and that he can convey impurity to something he didn't directly touch, if that item was beneath something he sat upon. This is a stringent form of impurity. It would seem obvious, then, that he defiles a utensil that he directly touches. Why is this verse necessary?

This leads Rashi to the possibility that a reader might assume that the novelty of the verse is its ruling that a *zav* can defile an earthenware utensil by merely touching its surface. To bolster this assumption, Rashi says, "as is taught in *Toras Kohanim*" referring not to the refutation of this assumption, but to the assumption itself. In other words, the fact that *Toras Kohanim* raises this possibility is proof for Rashi that it must be contended with.

Rashi refutes this assumption with a nuanced reading of our verse:

The previous verse said, "Whatever a *zav* touches... shall remain impure." (15:11) The words in our verse — "An earthenware utensil **which the *zav* will touch**" — seem entirely repetitive. The Torah could have just continued from the previous verse: "Whatever the *zav* touches... shall remain impure.... An earthenware utensil shall be broken"?

Rashi, therefore, concluded that the repetition of the word "touch" refers to a new form of touching, a touch that is comparable to touching the entire utensil — moving it. Thus, Rashi cites the conclusion of *Toras Kohanim* which bears out this point:

"What form of touching is considered as if he touched the whole utensil? When he moves it."

It was the close reading of the verse's repetition of "touch" itself that led Rashi to offer this explanation, not the *gezeirah shavah* employed by *Toras Kohanim*.

The Deeper Dimension:

A person is compared to an "earthenware utensil" because man was created from the earth.

A person cannot be contaminated from his "surface," meaning, from its natural contact with the material world. Being of the earth, people naturally gravitate toward material comforts and pleasures. Therefore, although they certainly do not aid a person's spiritual growth, they do not defile his soul either, because he is not expected to ignore his natural human needs.

Zivah is not a naturally occurring impurity; it is the result of a person's lifestyle and choices. This represents a conscious form of impurity, not the relatively benign material pursuits of a human being. So, perhaps a *zav* can confer impurity to a utensil from mere surface-level contact. Maybe this form of intentional materialism can contaminate the person.

Rashi and *Toras Kohanim* clarify that "only a touch that is considered as if he touched the whole utensil" can confer impurity upon a human being or an earthenware utensil. Meaning, only a person deliberately corrupting himself can affect a person's soul. But any incidental touch, even that of a *zav*, cannot contaminate the essence of a Jewish soul.