



The Community

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Boruch Hashem

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Rabbi's Article

Just Don't Get All Moved!

This week's Torah-portion discusses the laws of impurity that can befall a person. Among them is the impurity caused by a discharge. The verses state (-Leviticus 15:12), "*And an earthenware vessel which the man with the discharge will touch, shall be broken. And any wooden vessel shall be rinsed in water.*" Upon which Rashi (-Link) quotes the words, "*And an earthenware vessel which the man with the discharge will touch,*" and comments, "*One might think that even if he touches it from the outside... as is taught in Torath Kohanim (-Link), 'Which is the 'he touches' of the whole vessel? When he moves it.'*"

In order to understand this we are going to need to explore some categories and laws of impurities. The *Source*: Dead body, bodily discharges, or dead rodent. The *Recipient*: Person or vessel. The *Contact*: Touching, sitting/laying, or moving. Our case is speaking of: *Source*: discharge, *Recipient*: earthenware, and *Contact*: touching. Now, let us understand what and why Rash is commenting on this case.

Previously we were taught (ibid 11:32), "*But any earthenware vessel, into whose interior any of them (dead creatures) falls.*" Here, Rashi comments: "*An earthenware vessel becomes unclean only through its inner space.*" Meaning, that specifically with the earthenware, impurity is not transferred through touching, but through the *source* entering within the inside space of the vessel. Hence, Rashi is dealing with our verse stating, "*And an earthenware vessel which the man with the discharge will touch,*" and explains this *touching* means moving.

However, being that Rashi's commitment is to (-Rash, Genesis 3:8), "*But I have come only [to teach] the simple meaning of the Scripture,*" what forces Rashi to define *touch* as *move*? Especially, since we can simply say that in the first verse (-11:32), we are speaking of a more lenient source of impurity (dead rodent; *doesn't* impurify through *sitting/laying*), while our verse (-15:12) is speaking of a stricter source of impurity (discharge; *does* impurify through *sitting/laying*), hence it makes sense to say that even though the dead rodent only impurifies an earthenware through entering into its inner space, nevertheless, impurity from a discharge impurifies an earthenware even through touching its outside! Now, the *Torat Kohanim*, which Rashi himself alludes to, brings a proof from a *fortiori* (-Link) from a dead body (the strictest impurity), which doesn't impurify an earthenware by touching it from the outside, how much more so, that a discharge impurity doesn't. However, Rashi does not bring this *fortiori*. So, why does Rashi not simply accept that in our verse, *touch* means simple touching, without defining it to mean moving?

The answer is that Rashi is bothered our verse being redundant, especially the words, "*which the man with the discharge will touch.*" Verse 7 states, "*Anyone who touches the flesh of the man with a discharge... he shall remain unclean,*" and then verse 11 states, "*Whomever the man with the discharge touches, without having rinsed his hands... he shall remain unclean.*" The Talmud finds this redundancy telling us that it must be teaching us a totally different law, however, Rashi feels that in, "*the simple meaning of the Scripture,*" the addition of the detail of the hands (revealed organs) needing to be immersed in a purifying bath (but not any hidden organs), justifies the repetition of the entire verse. However, in our verse, where we again repeat the law of touching the one who had a discharge, with no *new* detail, Rashi is forced to say that there is a whole new detail in the law of touching an earthenware, which is the law of *moving* ("*he touches' of the whole vessel: he moves it*").

The Spiritual Lesson: Earthenware represents our body ("*And G-d formed man from the earth*"), and we are taught that, "*touching from the outside,*" our physical pursuits of eating, drinking, etc, to the overindulgence point of a discharge (spiritual ailment), as long as we have within us the humility of being an *earthenware*, he will not become impurified. Only when one allows himself to descend to the point of being, "*he (discharge) touches of the whole vessel,*" does he need his *external* egocentric will "*shall be broken,*" in order to reveal his eternal *inner* purity.