



Likkutei Sichos

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Self-Purification

Translated by Rabbi Eliezer Zalmanov
 Edited by Rabbi Eliezer Robbins and Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

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* and the *siyum* of tractate *Niddah*.

1.

FUTURE RESURRECTION PREVENTS IMPURITY

Regarding the laws of the impurity transmitted by corpses, *Yalkut Shimoni* comments on the verse,¹ “Anyone touching a human corpse shall be impure for seven days”:²

Touching a corpse transmits impurity, but the corpse itself is not impure. Touching a corpse transmits impurity, but the Shunamite’s son was not impure.³ They said, when the Shunamite’s son died, everyone in the house with him became impure for seven days, but when he was resurrected, he himself was pure {and was allowed} to use sanctified items. Then, if someone {who was in the house when he died} touched him, they contaminated him, too. Regarding this it can be said, “The source of your impurity did not contaminate me, rather you have contaminated me.”⁴

Yalkut Shimoni’s correlation between the Shunamite’s son not being impure and the corpse not being impure is easily understood: Since the corpse itself was not impure, therefore, the Shunamite’s son was also not impure after being resurrected (despite previously being a corpse that could contaminate others).

However, we need to clarify the wording, “**Touching a corpse** transmits impurity, but the Shunamite’s son himself was not impure.” The verse, “Anyone touching a... corpse shall be impure...,” means (as *Yalkut Shimoni* states at the outset) that only the one **touching** {the corpse} is contaminated, but “the corpse itself is not impure.” However, by including the novelty of the “Shunamite’s son,” the *Midrash* seemingly refers to his state post-**resurrection**, so the wording should have been: “Touching **a corpse** transmits impurity but touching the Shunamite’s son does not **transmit**

¹ *Bamidbar* 19:11.

² *Yalkut Shimoni*, *remez* 761, based on *Sifri Zuta*, ad loc.

³ {In *Melachim II* chapter 4, a woman from Shunem had a son that died and the prophet Elisha miraculously resurrected the boy.}

⁴ Meaning, others who were in contact with those that were contaminated, can state that the Shunamite’s son did not contaminate them, rather the others did. –*Zayis Raanan* commentary on *Yalkut Shimoni*.

impurity.” This would have implied that a person touching “the Shunamite’s son” is not impure, since he is not a corpse, but rather **alive**.

Magen Avraham comments on *Yalkut Shimoni*’s remark that “the corpse itself is not impure”: “The halachic ramification of this will be seen when the dead are all resurrected,⁵ as they will not require sprinkling {of the *Parah Adumah* admixture in order to become purified}.”⁶ Based on this (that even the ramification of the first part of the teaching, i.e., the clause “the corpse itself is not impure,” concerns (primarily) the time when the dead will be **resurrected**), we can say that both clauses — “the corpse itself is not impure” and “the Shunamite’s son was not impure” — discuss the same subject: The corpse itself is not impure, thus there is no requirement of sprinkling after it is resurrected; and the same applies to “the Shunamite’s son was not impure... when he was resurrected, he himself was pure to use sanctified items.”

But this raises another difficulty: What novelty does *Yalkut Shimoni* introduce by adding “the Shunamite’s son was not impure” after *Yalkut Shimoni* already established that “the corpse itself is not impure”?

2.

A DEBATE WITH FOOLS

This issue will be clarified based on the *Gemara*’s explanation towards the end of tractate *Niddah*.⁷ The *Gemara* cites a *Beraisa*, “The people of Alexandria⁸ queried Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya...,” to quote: “...three foolish questions: {a} ‘According to the law, does Lot’s wife transmit impurity?’ He replied, ‘A corpse transmits impurity, but a pillar of salt does not.’ {b} ‘According to the law, does the Shunamite’s son transmit impurity?’ He replied, ‘A corpse transmits impurity, but a living person does not.’ {c} ‘When Moshiach comes, do the {resurrected} dead require sprinkling on the third and seventh days?’ He

⁵ {When Moshiach comes.}

⁶ *Zayis Raanan*, *ibid*.

⁷ *Niddah* 69b.

⁸ {Jews living in the city Alexandria, Egypt.}

replied, ‘When they are resurrected, we will find a solution for them.’ Another version {of his reply}: ‘We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive with them.’”

To preface: We have discussed many times how all questions in the *Gemara*, including disputes and debates that the Jewish sages had with others — with Sadducees and Baytusians, etc., or (as in our case) Alexandrians — are sound, also according to Torah logic. This applies also to arguments and allegations that the *Gemara* refers to as being frivolous and foolish, etc. The intention {by referring to them as foolish, etc.} is not to imply that the arguments are illogical (and certainly illogical according to Torah) — since the Jewish sages did not engage with fools and ignoramuses, and such arguments would not have been included in the *Gemara*. This is especially so, since we always ask what the inclusion of something teaches us, even if true, if its truth is so obvious.

So the fact that the Jewish sages like Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, etc., engaged in disputes and debates, and these arguments were preserved in the Oral Torah, indicates that they are not only logically sound, but also have a basis according to Torah’s logic. Such disputes impart lessons that can enhance our understanding of the subject being disputed.

Thus, also prior to studying the sections of the Oral Torah with questions and arguments of Sadducees, etc., we must still recite the Torah blessings.

Despite the *Beraisa* referring to these as “foolish questions” (or the like), this is merely because certain details of the question are not analogous to the case at hand, etc. Also, they are considered “foolish questions” compared with our entire Torah, and compared with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanaya’s responses. As we see in our case: a) Even after Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanaya’s reply, the Alexandrian’s third question remained unanswered. b) Medieval and later Torah commentators examine the Alexandrian’s **questions** at length, and not only Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanaya’s responses. c) Specific Torah expositions must be marshalled in order to preclude the Shunamite’s son and the future resurrected dead, etc., from impurity — in addition to other compelling considerations.

3.

SEVEN QUESTIONS ON THE *BERAISA*

Additional noteworthy items in the *Beraisa* (regarding the “three foolish questions”):

a) Why do the Alexandrians ask (their second question), “According to the law, does the Shunamite’s son (whom Elisha resurrected) transmit impurity (after he was resurrected),” after Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya already answered that only “a corpse transmits impurity, but a pillar of salt does not”? This same logic could have been applied to the Shunamite’s son, too, who was not a corpse and therefore should not transmit impurity.

b) Commentators ask: Why did they ask about “the Shunamite’s son” and not about “the Zarephathite’s son,” who after dying, was revived by Eliyahu the Prophet — prior to the Shunamite’s son {being revived} by Elisha?

c) Regarding the answer to the third question, “When they are resurrected, we will find a solution for them,” or another version {of his reply}: “We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive with them”: If Rabbi Yehushua ben Chananya did not know the answer, why did he not simply respond, “I don’t know,” or something similar? (This is the trait of a wise person — “Concerning what he did not hear, he says, ‘I did not hear.’ He concedes to the truth, etc.”⁹)

d) What is the significance of the nuanced wording, “We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive,” rather than the typical wording: “When Eliyahu will come”?

e) Why does he say, “We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive with them” without concluding that Moshe will answer the question (or something similar) as he does in the first version: “we will find a solution for them”?

⁹ *Pirkei Avos* 5:7.

f) What is the significance of the nuanced wording, “We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive **with them**”?

g) The varying styles of question: In the first two questions, they ask “Does... transmit impurity?” but in the third question they say “require sprinkling... or not,” rather than “Do they require sprinkling?” or something similar.

4.

TWO STAGES IN CORPSE IMPURITY

The explanation for all this: The onset of corpse impurity has two parts: a) The life-force withdraws, i.e., the soul departs the body; and b) the body becomes a corpse. Each of these parts has several details and laws:

Generally speaking: The first part, the cessation of life, means that the **general** life-force departs the {entire} body, and only then can corpse impurity take effect. However, “limbs and skin that dangle from a body; although they can never become reanimated, remain pure.”¹⁰

A corpse must be somewhat similar in shape and form to a living body, therefore, “if it was burned to the extent that it lost its shape and form, it is pure.”¹¹ And there are several details and laws associated with this.

That is where the variation in the three questions come to play:

¹⁰ *Chullin* 129b in the *Mishnah*; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Tumas Meis*,” ch. 2, sec. 6.

¹¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Tumas Meis*,” ch. 3, sec. 9.

5.

TWO TYPES OF MIRACLES

The first question, “According to the law, does Lot’s wife transmit impurity?” can be simply explained: Lot’s wife becoming a “pillar of salt” was not natural but a miracle, and there are two categories of miracles:

a) When a miracle exchanges an item’s nature (its existence) with something else, for example “(Moshe’s) hand became leprosy like snow.” In that instance, once the miracle occurred, the leprosy on Moshe’s hand became **natural**, and a second miracle was required to reverse the leprosy, for his hand to “return to being regular skin.”

b) When a **miracle** does not change an item’s nature; rather, a constant {divine} influx alters the nature of the item, as was the case at the Splitting of the Sea. Similarly, the plague of “blood” when all the water {in Egypt} “turned into blood.” Even after the miracle occurred, water still existed; the miracle was the constant transformation of water into blood; therefore, once the miracle ended, the transformation of water into blood automatically ended, too.

This was the basis of the Alexandrians’ question, “According to the law, does Lot’s wife transmit impurity?": Her body’s metamorphosis into a pillar of salt, losing the shape and form of a body — did it occur through the first category of miracle, in which case, she does not transmit impurity, since there is no longer a bodily form? Or, was the second category of miracle at play, meaning that even after she became a pillar of salt, she retained the existence of flesh, etc. — a corpse of **a body** — in which case, she does transmit impurity?

6.

HOW DID LOT'S WIFE DIE?

But this explanation falls short, for on this basis, their question was not about actual corpse impurity but about the type of miracle that turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. That means that each of the {three} questions is about a different subject, which is unlikely.

We must therefore say that the question, “According to the law, does Lot's wife transmit impurity?” is **also** based on the concept of corpse impurity resulting from the soul's departure: Is corpse impurity generated by the actual departure of the soul (which can (seemingly) also be deduced from a dangling limb, which, as mentioned, remains pure, since there there is no **departure** of life {from the entire body} despite the limb being virtually dead)? Or is the soul's departure merely a reason for the **body's** impurity, but the impurity actually comes from the body. Meaning, corpse impurity **is generated** by (and applies to) the **body** from which a soul departs. This is somewhat **similar** to the discussion and analysis of (the positive side) of several *mitzvos* and Torah laws:

Regarding circumcision: Is the point of the *mitzvah* the act of circumcision, or is it the result of the act of circumcision — that the person is no longer uncircumcised (with the elaborate debate on this, and the practical differences, being well known)?

Similarly, the *mitzvah* of covering blood:¹² Is the point of the *mitzvah* the act of covering, what happens afterward being irrelevant, or is the *mitzvah* accomplished by achieving the result and purpose of covering — that the blood is {in fact} covered? This distinction also contains several halachic ramifications.

The Alexandrians' question, “According to the law, does Lot's wife transmit impurity?” is along these lines.

¹² {After slaughtering a wild animal or a bird.}

If corpse impurity is a result of a body being dead, and the soul's departure merely brings on the body's death, then we can easily understand why "Lot's wife" does not transmit impurity, since she no longer retains the shape and form of a dead **body**. However, if the impurity is activated by the soul's departure, then we can say that Lot's wife does transmit impurity, since her soul indeed vacated her body.

7.

THERE WAS NO BODY

"He replied, 'A corpse transmits impurity, but a pillar of salt does not.'" By not addressing the different sides of their question or providing any analysis, Rabbi Yeshoshua ben Chananya indicates that there is no real difference whether the miracle was that the body's form was completely exchanged or if the corpse essentially remained a human body. There is also no difference whether the soul's departure merely induces the {death, which causes} impurity or if it actually produces the impurity. Either way, "Lot's wife" does not transmit impurity, since "**A corpse** transmits impurity, but a pillar of salt does not."

By using the term "corpse," Rabbi Yehoshua does not mean to imply that the body must be dead — that much is obvious. Rather, he implies that the **determination** of death depends entirely on the body, and {only} a body that **qualifies** as a corpse can transmit impurity. But since a "pillar of salt" does not qualify as a corpse, it also cannot transmit corpse impurity [even if we were to accept that impurity is a result of the soul's departure, and derives from the **corpse** itself].

This also explains why the *Gemara* refers to these questions as "foolish" despite their basis in Torah logic: The the two ways {of understanding the onset of impurity} that prompt the question are irrelevant to the answer itself, and either way {i.e., regardless of which of the two ways one regards as true}, the answer and conclusion remain the same.

8.

HE IS ALIVE

“According to the law, does the Shunamite’s son transmit impurity?” — In this instance, the question is only about the soul’s departure from the body. As far as the body is concerned, impurity is possible since there was no loss of the body’s form, and the person was also considered dead (as mentioned in the answer to their previous question). The only question is: Since the lifeforce {initially} left the body, does the impurity that resulted from the **initial** departure now get nullified, since the lifeforce has now returned and the person is alive, or does this impurity persist even after the body was restored to life?

To explain: Regarding Elisha’s method in resurrecting the Shunamite’s son, the verse states: “And he went up and lay on the child, and placed his **mouth** on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his palms on his palms, and he prostrated himself upon him; the child's flesh became warm... the lad sneezed up to seven times, and the lad opened his eyes.”¹³ This implies that the child’s own life was not restored to him, but rather, Elisha imbued him with a new lifeforce — Elisha’s lifeforce.

Thus, we can understand why they did not ask about the Zarephathite’s son, whom Eliyahu revived, because in that instance Eliyahu had pleaded, “please **restore the soul of this child** within him, and Hashem hearkened to the voice of Eliyahu and the child's soul returned within him, and he lived.”¹⁴ Since “the soul of this child” was returned to him, the initial departure of the soul was undone, and {in this instance} the child clearly did not transmit impurity.

Regarding the Shunamite’s son, however, since his own soul was not returned but remained separated from the body — the question then arises “does he transmit impurity”? Meaning, does the concept of the soul’s departure apply

¹³ *Melachim II* 4:34-35.

¹⁴ *Melachim I* 17:21-22.

to a body with a new life force or is {the departure of the soul, and thus the impurity associated with} it nullified?

So, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya replied, “A **corpse** transmits impurity, but a living person does not” — despite the fact that it wasn’t the child’s own soul that was returned to him: All the qualifications and requirements for corpse impurity — the soul’s departure, a dead body, etc. — apply only when the body is actually a “corpse,” but once it is alive, even if previously it had been a corpse, it cannot transmit impurity, since the {new} life force nullifies and purifies the corpse impurity.

This question, too, qualifies as “foolish”: The various considerations are irrelevant; it does not matter whether the soul’s departure persists or is nullified — all that matters is the body’s current condition, and the general rule is that “a **living person** does not transmit impurity.” Since the child was ultimately alive, there was no basis for him to be considered impure or to transmit corpse impurity.

9.

PASSIVE TRANSMISSION

The question can still be asked: As a corpse, this same body was impure — moreover, with the highest level of impurity — so how did this impurity suddenly depart from the body? As the *Gemara* puts it, “Where did the impurity that was in it go?”

This can be clarified based on *Yalkut Shimoni*’s earlier explanation: “Touching a corpse transmits impurity {to the object that touches the corpse}, but the corpse itself is *not* impure.” Therefore the Shunamite’s son was, in fact, pure, and there is no dispute about this (concerning {the statement of} Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya (and the Alexandrians’ supposition)). Nothing is baffling about this, since impurity from a corpse is a scriptural decree.¹⁵ As

¹⁵ {Thus, not being a logical concept in the first place, there is no problem with the Torah making exceptions.}

Midrash Psikta states, “The corpse does not cause the impurity nor does the water cause the purification; rather, it is the decree of the King of Kings.”¹⁶

This explains why their question regarding the Shunamite’s son was “does it transmit impurity” (to someone else), and not whether he himself was impure. So, too, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya’s response was that “a corpse **transmits impurity**, but a living person does not **transmit impurity**,” since the issue was whether or not the Shunamite’s son could transmit impurity to someone else as a result of the scriptural decree.

10.

SELF-NFLICTED IMPURITY OR NOT?

“Do the {resurrected} dead, when Moshiach comes, require sprinkling on the third and seventh days or not?": The Alexandrians’ question was not whether the resurrected dead can transmit impurity to someone else, since that was already addressed by saying, “A corpse transmits impurity, but a **living person** does not.” Moreover, according to the reasoning behind their second question (that the Shunamite’s son received a new soul), the resurrected dead do not transmit impurity, because Hashem will return their original souls to their bodies (as the *Gemara* says {regarding that period}, “He will drop the soul into the body and judge them as one...”), so the previous departure of the soul will be nullified. Their question is only (as commentators note) whether they become impure themselves through touching their own bodies — since their living bodies come in contact with their corpses in the process of being resurrected? Thus, the question is whether they “require sprinkling on the third and seventh days or not.” Meaning, is impurity transmitted only when someone else touches the corpse but not when he touches himself, or does impurity by contact apply also when he “touches” himself?

This inquiry depends on the explanation as to how the resurrection will occur: a) whether the body will retain something from its original existence, but a special addition and renewal will be infused into the recomposition of the

¹⁶ *Pesikta D’rav Kahana* 4:9; *Pesikta Rabbasi* 14:14; *Rambam*, end of “*Hilchos Mikvaos*.”

body. With this method, there will be contact with (part of) the corpse, and therefore those resurrected will require “sprinkling.” b) Alternatively, the resurrection will bring about a complete renewal of all the body’s components, with nothing remaining from its former existence. That being the case, they will not require sprinkling, since there will be no contact with a corpse, which transmits impurity.

Therefore, their question was specifically worded, “do {they} require sprinkling... or not” (without prefacing “according to the law”), implying that the question was not about the **laws** governing contact with a corpse, but a question about the reality {of how the resurrection will occur}: Will the resurrection occur in a way that will require sprinkling or not?

11.

A NEW EXISTENCE

More specifically, we will understand this based on a *Mishnah* in tractate *Keilim*:¹⁷ “A bed that had contracted *midras*¹⁸ impurity: If a {a board on the} long side of it was broken and then he repaired it, the bed still retains its *midras* impurity (since the second “long side” remained intact). If the second side was also broken and then he repaired it, the bed is purified from *midras* impurity (since it is now an entirely new object) but is impure by virtue of *contact* with the *midras* (since the new “long side” came in contact with the bed while it was still a *midras*). If the second side broke before he managed to repair the first side, the bed is pure (even from contact with a *midras*).”

Meaning, if the article was repaired while its other section was complete, impurity is transmitted on contact. But if the repair occurs after the entire article broke, impurity is not transmitted on contact.

¹⁷ Ch. 18, *mishnah* 6.

¹⁸ {Impurity transmitted by an impure person sitting or leaning on the bed.}

The *Gemara* says in tractate *Sanhedrin*:¹⁹

The Roman emperor said to Rabban Gamliel: “You say that the dead will live again. Aren’t they dust? Can dust come to life?” The emperor’s daughter said to {Rabban Gamliel}: “Leave him, and I will reply. In our city, there are two craftsmen: one who fashions vessels from water, and one who fashions vessels from mortar. Who is more noteworthy?” The emperor said to her: “The one who fashions vessels from water.” His daughter said to him: “If he is able to fashion a vessel from water, all the more so is he able to fashion vessels from mortar!” The school of Rabbi Yishmael deduced this from glass vessels: If concerning glass vessels, which are fashioned by human breath, if they break they can be repaired; then regarding humans themselves, whose souls are a product of Hashem’s breath, all the more so {that they can be resurrected}.

These two illustrations evince the two methods of resurrection: If the resurrected will be “**fashioned** from water... and mortar,” then despite there now being an issue of corpse impurity (which exists before the resurrection), since at that point we consider it a “new object,” there is still impurity by **contact**, since some of the original existence remains, from which body is “re-formed” (similar to the second instance in the *mishnah* of tractate *Keilim*).

The school of Rabbi Yishmael’s comparison of the resurrected to “**glass vessels... if they break**” implies that there is no relationship with a person’s previous existence; since, as the law stipulates regarding glass vessels, once they “break,” their status as vessels is lost, and if they were impure, they now become completely pure. The same may be said about the resurrection — the revival will be akin to creating a new vessel from the shards of a broken glass vessel — the new vessel has no relation to its previous existence. Thus, this new entity cannot become impure through contact with a corpse (as is the latter case in the *Mishnah* regarding *midras* impurity), and therefore does “not require” sprinkling.

¹⁹ *Sanhedrin* 90b ff.

12.

THE DESERT GENERATION'S RESURRECTION

“Another version {of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya’s reply to the Alexandrians}: ‘We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive with them.’” According to this version, their question was not about the general resurrection of the dead when Moshiach comes, because Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya is of the opinion that the resurrection will occur through the body being rebuilt from the “*luz* bone in the spine.” Clearly, then, there is contact with a corpse (as will soon be explained). Rather, their question was specifically about the resurrection of the generation that {left Egypt and} died in the desert.

To explain: There is a dispute regarding the generation that died in the desert: Rabbi Akiva says that “they have no share in the World to Come,” and Rabbi Eliezer maintains that they do have a share in the World to Come.²⁰ When {the Sage} Rabbah saw them {the generation that died in the desert} lying down like drunks, it implied that Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion was correct.

Regarding the manner in which the (general) resurrection will occur, there are two opinions: a) The resurrection will begin with the indestructible *luz* bone. Hence, the prophet’s statement: “May Your dead live,”²¹ and not “be **created**,” because the resurrection will not entail the creation of an entirely new body; rather, the body will be rebuilt around the “*luz* bone.” b) Alternatively, as *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* states: “Nothing remains of the body except a spoonful of **decayed matter** which becomes mixed with the dust of the earth, like yeast which is mixed with the dough....”

We can say that when Rabbi Akiva states that the generation that died in the desert “have no share in the World to Come,” he means that they (their bodies) will not retain their original existence when resurrected in the World to Come, because their “*luz* bone” will also dissolve. But once they become a “spoonful of decayed matter,” they too will arise at the resurrection of the dead.

²⁰ *Sanhedrin* 108a in the *Mishnah*, and 110b.

²¹ *Yeshayahu* 26:19.

This was the basis of the Alexandrians' third question: In what manner will the generation that died in the desert be resurrected? Will at least the *luz* bones of their bodies remain, and thus they will "require sprinkling," since even a barley-sized bone transmits impurity, and they will be impure as a result of "touching" themselves? Or, will the only remnant of their previous existence be a "spoonful of decayed matter," in which case they would "not require sprinkling," since a spoonful of decayed matter does not transmit impurity by touch but rather by {diffusing impurity to an object by} being under the same roof {with it}. And even if under the same roof, several conditions must be met in order to transmit impurity: "It was buried naked in a coffin of marble, glass, or the like; and it was buried totally intact."²²

13.

WILL MOSHE ARRIVE WITH THEM OR NOT?

To this Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya replied: "We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive with them." To explain: The *Midrash Tanchuma* on our *parshah* says:²³

This is comparable to a shepherd who went to pasture the king's flock, and later the flock was stolen. When the shepherd sought entry to the king's palace, the king said to him, "They will say that you stole the flock." Here, too, Hashem said to Moshe, "Would it be praise for you that you led six-hundred thousand people out of bondage and buried them in the desert, and are bringing another generation into Israel? This will lead people to say that the generation that died in the desert has no share in the World to Come. Rather, stay by their side, and come along with them."

This teaches us that Moshe, who was the shepherd of Israel, will also have to return with the generation that died in the desert, specifically {with} the souls as they are en clothed in their bodies. Moshe cared for them (the generation in

²² *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Tumas Meis," 3:4 (based on *Niddah* 27b).

²³ *Tanchuma*, "Chukas," sec. 10.

the desert) as souls in bodies. [For this reason, not only did Moshe attend to all the spiritual needs of his generation, e.g., giving them the Torah (which also occurred specifically as the people were souls in bodies), he also attended to their material needs, e.g. the manna; additionally, Miriam’s well and clouds of glory were returned in Moshe’s merit].²⁴

This is what Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya implied when he answered “We will wait for Moshe Rabbeinu to arrive **with them**”: Moshe Rabbeinu’s arrival “**with them**” will prove that they have a share in the World to Come just like Moshe. This illustrates that their resurrection will come from their bodies’ original existence (the *luz* bone), and they will therefore require sprinkling. [And if Moshe does not come with them, this will mean that they do not have a share in the World to Come, and that their resurrection will be from a spoonful of decayed matter — in which case, they will “not require” sprinkling.]

14.

EMPHASIS ON TOUCHING

This also explains *Yalkut Shimoni*’s novel exposition simply: The first teaching that “anyone touching a human corpse shall be impure for seven days,” (primarily) introduces the novelty that the corpse itself is not impure, and it only transmits impurity to others because of a scriptural decree, as discussed above. Accordingly, this means that there is no reason for a living person to transmit impurity based on a scriptural decree.

The second novel exposition teaches that “touching a corpse transmits impurity, but the Shunamite’s son was not **impure**.” The novel insight here is not that he does not transmit impurity after his revival as a corpse would (since we know this already from the earlier teaching). Rather {the novelty is that} he himself is not impure from “touching” **his own** body at the time of his revival.

²⁴ {Initially, the well appeared in Miriam’s merit and the Clouds of Glory in Aharon’s, but after their passing, both items returned solely in Moshe’s merit.}

This clarifies the lesson based on the verse, “**touching** a human corpse”: Here, too, the emphasis is “**touching** a human corpse” (similar to the previous teaching that “touching a corpse transmits impurity, but the corpse itself is not impure”), not on the word “corpse” on its own, as discussed.

15.

A NEW EXISTENCE

This is also the explanation for the wording of the Alexandrians’ third question, “Do the {resurrected} dead when Moshiach comes require sprinkling on the third and seventh days or not?” They were asking specifically in the context of the Shunamite’s son requiring sprinkling, since that’s what they were just discussing. The question about sprinkling is based on them “touching” themselves {during the resurrection process}, not because of actual corpse impurity (as discussed above at length). This concern exists only regarding the resurrection when Moshiach comes, since the living will “touch” themselves (i.e., the remnants of their corpses). But regarding the Shunamite’s son, “it was obvious to them that he did not require sprinkling” (as *Tosafos*²⁵ explains); because the Shunamite’s son’s body never changed. Throughout the ordeal, the body retained its form.

To put it differently: The resurrection of the Shunamite’s son was (different than the resurrection of the dead will be when Moshiach comes, concerning which we can say that (a portion of) the body will be repaired and rebuilt; rather, it involved) a transformation into an entirely new existence — a live entity instead of a dead one. (In particular, this is based on the abovementioned reasoning, that the Shunamite’s son’s {original} soul was not returned; instead, he received a new life force {from Elisha}, and he was thus considered a new being). Therefore, there was clearly no corpse impurity that resulted from him “touching” himself.

²⁵ On *Niddah* 70b.

16.

JUSTIFICATION

One more (brief) point, which will help us appreciate why these three questions were of particular interest to the people of Alexandria. To preface:

Alexandria was a city in Egypt, about which the Torah says “you shall not return...,” and, “Alexandria was included in this prohibition.”²⁶

Their justification {for living there} may have been: They had initially planned only to reside there temporarily, not to settle permanently. Although eventually they did settle there permanently, they reasoned that their initial intent was decisive {in determining the permissibility of their residence there}. In order to clarify {and validate} their position, they asked these three questions: Lot’s wife — although she ended up becoming a “pillar of salt,” she started out as a human, so what does the law say about her transmitting impurity? And at least the Shunamite’s son, whose body was the same {after being revived, don’t we regard his original state as decisive}? At any rate, regarding the ultimate resurrection — which will entail resurrection of bodies with their *original* souls, as discussed — they should require sprinkling. After all, when they were born, they were subject to the command that “when a person dies” and someone touches the corpse, sprinkling on the third and seventh days is required.

17.

TORAH PURIFIES

“All of Israel has a share in the World to Come”²⁷ — all Jews will arise again with souls in their bodies. We can still say, however, that by engaging in Torah study nowadays, we will not need recourse to the sprinkling {of the Red Heifer’s ashes} when Moshiach comes, despite everyone’s *luz* bone remaining intact. Because our Sages say, “Whoever uses the light of Torah will be revived by the

²⁶ *Rambam Hilchos Melachim* 5:7.

²⁷ *Sanhedrin* 90a.

light of Torah”²⁸ (or, put differently, “the dew of Torah will revive him”).²⁹ And when the resurrection happens through the light of Torah and the dew of Torah, this itself will purify those who arise in the course of the resurrection.

-Based on a talk delivered on the 24th of Teves, 5711 (1951)

²⁸ *Kesuvos* 111b.

²⁹ *Yalkut Shimoni* on *Yeshayahu* 26:19; *Tanya*, ch, 36 near the end.