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Discerning Different Shades

Ameimar, Mar Zutra, and Rav Ashi were in front of a blood letter. He began letting Ameimar’s blood, and Ameimar remarked that the first blood drawn is what the *Mishna* refers to as red like a wound. When the blood letter drew blood a second time, Ameimar remarked that this blood is a different shade. Rav Ashi said that since he didn’t discern any difference between them, he can’t rule on blood stains. (20a)

Black Blood

The *Mishna* had stated that black blood (*is tamei*) refers to anything like *cheres* (a type of black pigment).

Rabbah the son of Rav Huna said: The ‘cheres’ of which the Rabbis spoke is (*that which dissolves in*) ink (*and not that which dissolves in water*).

The *Gemora* notes: It was also taught in a *braisa* like that: Black (*in respect of a woman’s blood*) is a color like *cheres*, and the ‘black’ of which the Rabbis spoke is the color of ink.

The *Gemora* asks: Then why wasn’t ‘ink’ directly stated?

The *Gemora* answers: If ‘ink’ had been stated, I might have thought that it refers to the watery part of the ink, therefore we were informed that the color is like that of the sediment of the ink.

They inquired: Is the reference to liquid or to dry ink (*for it was common for them to boil the ink until it evaporated, and a dried mass would remain – this could be used at a later time*)?

The *Gemora* proves this from the practice of Rabbi Ami, who used to split a grain of dried ink, and with it he performed the necessary examination (*by comparing it to a black bloodstain; we see that dried ink is used*).

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: If a woman’s blood has a color like that of black wax, black ink or a black grape she is *tamei*; and it is this that was meant by what we learned in the *Mishna* that if it is darker (*than cheres*), it is *tamei*.

Rabbi Elozar ruled: A woman’s blood that has a color like that of a black olive, pitch or a raven is *tahor*; and it is this that was meant by what we learned in the *Mishna* that if it is darker (*than cheres*), it is *tahor*.

Ulla said: Black like a Seva garment (*is tamei*). [*Seva is a name of a place where they made black garments.*]

Ulla once visited Pumbedesa when he noticed an Arab merchant who was wearing a black garment. He told them, “The black of which we have learned he is a color like this.” They tore pieces off the garment in bits, and paid him for it four hundred zuz (*for now they had a clear comparison to rule with*).

Rabbi Yochanan said: This material of *olyarin* (*cloaks which would be given to people by the bathhouse attendants*) that are imported from beyond the sea (*is the “black” referred to in the Mishna*).

The *Gemora* asks: This then implies that such clothes are black, but didn’t Rabbi Yannai request the following to his sons, “My sons, do not bury me either in black shrouds or white shrouds; ‘not in black,’ for I may be worthy (*of a place with the righteous in the World to Come*) and I would be like a mourner among bridegrooms, and ‘not in white,’ for perhaps I might not be worthy and would be like a bridegroom among mourners; rather, bury me with the cloaks of

olyarin (which are red) that are imported from beyond the sea.” This evidently proves, does it not, that these are not black?

The *Gemora* answers: This is not difficulty, for Rabbi Yannai was indeed referring to cloaks (*which are red*), while Rabbi Yochanan was referring to linens on a table (*also from olyarin, which are black*).

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: And all these (*shades of blood*) must be tested only on a white cloth (*for then the true color can be discernible*).

Rav Yitzchak bar Avdimi said: But black blood may be tested on a red cloth.

Rabbi Yirmiyah of Difti noted: There is really no difference of opinion between them, since the latter speaks only of black blood (*which can be discernible on red cloth*), while the former refers to the other kinds of blood (*that are red, and therefore require a white cloth*).

Rav Ashi asked: If so, why didn't Shmuel say: [*They must be tested upon a white cloth*] with the exception of black (*blood*)?

Rather, said Rav Ashi, they disagree on the very question of black itself (*if it needs a white cloth, or even red would suffice*).

Ulla ruled: In the case of all these colors (*the other four colors mentioned in the Mishna*), if the discharge is darker it is *tamei*, and if it is lighter it is *tahor*, just as is the case with black.

The *Gemora* asks: Then why did the *Mishna* mention only black?

The *Gemora* answers: As it might have been presumed that, since Rabbi Chanina explains that black blood is actually a spoiled form of red, it should therefore be *tamei* even if it is lighter; therefore we were informed that even if it is lighter it is still *tahor*.

Rabbi Ami bar Abba ruled: In the case of all these colors (*the other four colors mentioned in the Mishna*), if the discharge is darker it is *tamei*, and if it is lighter it is also *tamei* - the only exception being black (*where if it is lighter it is tahor*).

The *Gemora* asks: What then was the use of the standard shade laid down by the Rabbis (*for even if it is a lighter shade it is still tamei*)?

The *Gemora* answers: It is to exclude a shade that is extremely faint (*i.e., if it is much lighter, then it is tahor*).

There are others who cited the following version: Rami bar Abba ruled: In the case of all these colors (*the other four colors mentioned in the Mishna*), if the discharge is darker it is *tahor*, and if it is lighter it is also *tahor* - the only exception being black; and it is for this reason that the Rabbis laid down this standard.

Bar Kappara ruled: In the case of all these colors (*the other four colors mentioned in the Mishna*), if the discharge is darker it is *tamei*, and if it is lighter it is *tahor*, the exception being the color of diluted wine in which a darker shade is *tahor* and a lighter one is also *tahor*.

The colleagues of Bar Kappara once lightened blood (*that was initially the shade of diluted wine*), and when it was shown to him, he declared it *tahor*. They once darkened blood (*that was initially the shade of diluted wine*), and when it was shown to him, he also declared it *tahor*. Rabbi Chanina exclaimed: How great is this man, whose heart is in agreement with his teaching. (20a)

Crocus

The *Mishna* had stated: Like the (*color of the*) corner of *karkom* – like the clear leaves (*of a crocus plant, which are the brightest*).

A *Tanna* taught in a *braisa*: Moist crocus and not dry one.

The *Gemora* cites one *braisa* which states: Like the lower leaf (*of the crocus*), but not like the upper one, and another *braisa* taught: Like the upper leaf but not like the lower one, while a third *braisa* taught: Like the upper leaf (*it is tamei*) and certainly if it is like the lower one, and a fourth *braisa* taught: Like the lower leaf and certainly if it is like the upper one!?

Abaye explains: The crocus has three rows of leaves and there are three leaves in each row; (*when comparing blood*) hold the middle row and the middle leaf of that row (*in your hand, and that is the*

moistest, and it is the one which manifests this type of red color). [The other leaves in that row may also be used as the standard, but the upper and lower rows are not colors that would be tamei. The braisos can therefore be reconciled as follows: The first and second braisa state that the middle row should be used as the standard, and not the upper row or the lower row. The third braisa teaches that if the blood is the color of the upper leaf in the third row, it is tamei, and certainly if it is the color of the 'lower one' – the middle leaf of that row. The fourth braisa teaches that if the blood is the color of the lower leaf in the third row, it is tamei, and certainly if it is the color of the 'upper one' – the middle leaf of that row.]

When they came before Rabbi Avahu he told them: What we learned about the color of the crocus refers to such that are still attached to their clods (for then their color is much redder than that of the detached plant, which may not be used as a standard). (20a)

Red Blood

The *Mishna* had stated: Like (the color of) soil in water – like the soil of *bais kerem*, covered and mixed with water.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Like (the color of) soil in water; one brings fertile soil from the valley of Bais Kerem, over which he causes water to float; these are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah said: From the valley of Yodfas (the soil is brought). Rabbi Yosi said: From the valley of Sichni. Rabbi Shimon said: Also from the valley of Ginnosar (it may be brought), and any similar soil.

Another *braisa* taught: And like (the color of) soil in water; one brings fertile soil from the valley of Bais Kerem, over which he causes water to float until it forms a layer as thin as the peel of a garlic bulb; and no quantity has been prescribed for the water, since none has been prescribed for the soil (the only requirement being that the water covers the soil). The water is not to be examined when it is clear, but rather, when it is muddy (by mixing the dirt and the water). If they become clear, they must be stirred up again, and when they are stirred one must not do it with his hand, but with a vessel.

They inquired: What is meant when the *braisa* stated that 'when they are stirred one must not do it with his hand, but with a vessel'? Does it mean that a man must not put it (the mixture) in his hand

and stir it, but that where it is in a vessel it is fine for him to stir it with his hand, or perhaps the meaning is that one must not stir it with his hand (when the mixture is in a vessel), but a utensil should be used?

The *Gemora* attempts to prove this from the following *braisa*: When he examines it, he must do it only in a cup (which seemingly proves that no examination may be performed with the water and the soil in one's hand).

The *Gemora* deflects the proof by saying that the question still remains: While the examination must take place in a cup, how is the stirring done (with a utensil or with his hand)?

The *Gemora* leaves this question unresolved.

When they came before Rabbah bar Avuha, he told them: What we learned about the soil refers to such that is in its own place (for exporting it elsewhere will change the shade of the color). (20a)

Examining Blood

Rabbi Chanina used to break up a piece of earth and thereby performed the examination (without mixing any water with it).

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi cursed with *askerah* (a disease which infects the throat) any other person who adopts such a practice, for Rabbi Chanina was wise enough (to perform such an examination even without water); all others, however, are not so wise.

Rabbi Yochanan remarked: The wisdom of Rabbi Chanina caused me not to examine any blood, for when I declared a stain to be *tamei* he declared it *tahor*, and when I declared it to be *tahor* he declared it *tamei*.

Rabbi Elozar noted: Rabbi Chanina's humbleness is the cause of my examining blood, for I felt that if Rabbi Chanina, who was humble, allowed himself to be involved in uncertainties and examined blood, should I not examine it as well?

Rabbi Zeira said: The Babylonian scholars of nature was the cause of my refusing to examine blood, for I thought that if I do not



understand nature, would I then understand the expertise of examining blood?

The *Gemora* notes that this then implies that capability to examine blood depends on an understanding of natural science; but didn't Rabbah in fact understand nature, and yet did not understand how to examine blood?

The *Gemora* answers: He was really drawing an inference in a manner of "all the more so." If Rabbah, who understood natural science, nevertheless refrained from examining blood, should I (*who does not know natural science*) examine it?

Ulla once visited Pumbedisa, and when some blood was brought to him for examination, he refused to see it. He said: If Rabbi Elozar, who was the supreme authority for the entire Land of Israel, refused to see blood whenever he visited the place of Rabbi Yehudah (*out of respect for the local Sage*), should I examine it?!

The *Gemora* notes that he was described as the supreme authority for the entire Land of Israel, because a woman once brought some blood before Rabbi Elozar when Rabbi Ami sat in his presence. Rabbi Elozar smelled the blood and told her: This is blood of desire (*for your husband; there is a dispute amongst the Rishonim if such blood is tahor or tamei*). After she went out, Rabbi Ami asked her about this, and she told him: My husband was away on a journey and I desired him. Thereupon, he applied the following verse to Rabbi Elozar: *The secret of Hashem is with those that fear Him.*

Ifra Hormiz (*a gentile woman who wished to convert; she kept the laws of niddah*), the mother of King Shapur, once sent some blood to Rava when Rav Ovadyah was sitting in his presence. Rava smelled the blood and said to him, "This is blood of desire." She said to her son, "Come and see how wise the Jews are." He replied, "It is quite possible that he hit upon it (*through luck*) like a blind man goes through a skylight." Thereupon, she sent to him sixty different kinds of blood and he identified them all, but the last one, which was lice blood, he could not figure out. He had Divine assistance, however, and he sent her a comb that kills lice. "Jews," she exclaimed, "You seem to live in the chambers of one's heart."

Rav Yehudah stated: At first I used to examine blood, but since the mother of my son Yitzchak told me, "We do not bring the first drop (*of blood*) to the Rabbis because it is smelly," I refuse to examine it

(*because the color can change, and though the second drop may be one of tahor blood, it cannot be used to establish that the woman is tahor, for perhaps the first drop, which she did not present for examination, was one of tamei blood*). An examination, however, for the purpose of distinguishing between tamei blood and tahor (after a woman has given birth), I certainly do perform (*for the blood is not smelly, and she would present the first drop*).

Yalta (*the wife of Rav Nachman*) once brought some blood to Rabbah bar bar Chanah, who informed her that it was *tamei*. She then took it to Rav Yitzchak the son of Rav Yehudah, who told her that it was *tahor*.

The *Gemora* asks: But how could Rav Yitzchak act in this manner, seeing that it was taught in a *braisa*: If a Sage declared something *tamei*, another Sage may not declare it *tahor*; if he forbade something, his colleague may not permit it!?

The *Gemora* answers: At first he informed her that it was indeed *tamei*, but when she told him that on every other occasion Rabbah bar bar Chanah declared such blood as *tahor*, but that this time he had an ailment in his eye, he gave her his ruling that it was *tahor*.

The *Gemora* asks: But are women believed in such circumstances?

The *Gemora* answers: Yes, and so it was also taught in a *braisa*: A woman is believed when she says, 'I saw blood like the color of this one, but I have lost it.'

They inquired: What is the law where another woman says, A kind of blood like this (*the same color*) has been declared *tahor* by such and such a Sage?

The *Gemora* attempts to resolve this from the *braisa* cited above: A woman is believed when she says, "I saw blood like the color of this one, but I have lost it."

The *Gemora* deflects the proof, for that case is different, since the blood is not available (*for us to examine; it is only in such a case where a woman is believed; however, when the blood is before us, she is not believed and it must be examined*).

The *Gemora* attempts to prove it from the case of Yalta (*mentioned above*): She once brought some blood to Rabbah bar bar Chanah,

who informed her that it was *tamei*. She then took it to Rav Yitzchak the son of Rav Yehudah, who told her that it was *tahor*. The *Gemora* had asked: But how could Rav Yitzchak act in this manner, seeing that it was taught in a *braisa*: If a Sage declared something *tamei*, another Sage may not declare it *tahor*; if he forbade something, his colleague may not permit it!? The *Gemora* had answered: At first he informed her that it was indeed *tamei*, but when she told him that on every other occasion Rabbah bar Chanah declared such blood as *tahor*, but that this time he had an ailment in his eye, he gave her his ruling that it was *tahor*. Now, this evidently proves that a woman is believed!

The *Gemora* disagrees (*maintaining that she is not believed, and the reason he ruled tahor was because*) Rav Yitzchak the son of Rav Yehudah relied on his own traditions (*as to which blood is tahor; he only relied on her testimony with respect of not contradicting Rabbah's ruling*).

Rebbe once examined some blood at night and declared it *tamei*, but when he examined it in the day time he declared it *tahor*. He then waited a while and again declared it *tamei*. "Woe is to me," he said, "I may have made a mistake (*by declaring it tamei*)"

The *Gemora* asks: Perhaps he has made a mistake? Has he not in fact definitely made a mistake, seeing that it was taught in a *braisa*: A Sage must not say, "If the blood had been moist it would undoubtedly have been *tamei*." He must rather say, "A judge must be guided only by that which his eyes see"?

The *Gemora* answers: At first he presumed it to be definitely *tamei* (*and he ruled like that even though he only observed it at night*), but when he observed in the morning that its color had changed (*to a lighter shade*), he said that it was undoubtedly *tahor*, and evidently at night it could not be seen properly. When, however, he observed later that the color had changed again he said that it must be *tamei* blood, but the color is steadily fading away. 3.

Rebbe examined blood with the light of a candle. Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi examined it even on a cloudy day between the pillars of the Study Hall.

Rav Ami bar Shmuel ruled: All kinds of blood must be examined only between the sun and the shade. Rav Nachman said in the

name of Rabbah bar Avuha: The examination may be performed in the sun under the shadow of one's hand.

The *Mishna* had stated: Like diluted wine – a mixture of two parts water and one part wine from the Sharon region.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Sharon wine (*when it is diluted*) is regarded (*with respect of its color*) as the Carmel wine in its natural undiluted state when it is new and not old.

Rav Yitzchak bar Avudimi ruled: All these must be examined only in a plain Tiberian cup (*made of glass*).

Abaye explained the reason for this: Generally a glass cup that contains a *log* is made of a *maneh* (*of glass*), and one that contains two *log* is made of two hundred *zuz* (*two maneh*), but the plain Tiberian cup, even if it contains two *log*, it is still made of one *maneh*, and since it is so thin, the color of the wine can be discernible better (*than in any other kind of cup*). (20a – 21a)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Two Rulings

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa* which states that one who received a ruling from on Sage prohibiting something, he may not ask another Sage who may permit it.

Tosfos (A"Z 7a Hanish'al) adds a number of qualifications to this statement:

It is only forbidden to ask another Sage if he does not mention the first ruling he received.

The second Sage should not permit it, unless he feels he can convince the first Sage that he erred.

If the first Sage permitted, the second Sage can forbid.