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Tumah of an Idol

The *Gemora* asks on Rabbah from a *braisa*: An idol is like a *sheretz* and its service utensils are like a *sheretz*. Rabbi Akiva said: An idol is like a *niddah*, and its service utensils are like a *sheretz*. [*Seemingly, the Rabbis maintain that an idol is not subject to the tumah of carrying – just as a sheretz.*] Now, according to Rabbi Elozar, it is well (*for it is only R’ Aviva who maintains that an idol is subject to the tumah of carrying*); but according to Rabbah’s view, there is a difficulty (*for according to him, both the Rabbis and R’ Akiva agree that an idol is subject to the tumah of carrying*)?

The *Gemora* answers: Rabbah can say to you: Is it stronger than the *Mishna* (*mentioned on the previous Daf*) which states: Its stones, wood, and earth cause *tumah* like a *sheretz*, and I explained that when it states ‘like a *sheretz*,’ it means that it does not render *tamei* through a ‘placed stone’ [*‘Even mesama’ - a stone set up upon supports, and under it lay garments or utensils; the stone does not come into contact with these things. The issue is whether these utensils are rendered tamei when an idol is placed upon the stone.*]; here too it means that it does not render *tamei* through a ‘placed stone.’

The *Gemora* asks on Rabbah from another *braisa*: An idolater, an idolatress, an idol and its service utensils, they themselves are *tamei*, but not their *hesset* (*i.e., if they are carried by a tahor person, and that person did not come into actual contact with them, the person remains tahor; he is not rendered tamei through tumah by carrying*). Rabbi

Akiva maintained: They (*are tamei*) and their *hesset* (*that which carries them is tamei*). Now, according to Rabbi Elozar, it is well (*for he maintains that the Rabbis and R’ Aviva dispute if an idol is subject to the tumah of carrying*); but according to Rabbah’s view, there is a difficulty (*for according to him, both the Rabbis and R’ Akiva agree that an idol is subject to the tumah of carrying*)?

The *Gemora* answers: Rabbah can say to you: And even according to your view (*is it any better*); can you say of an idolater and an idolatress that they are *tamei* but not their *hesset*? Surely it was taught in a *braisa*: *Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: when a man has a discharge. A braisa taught that only the Children of Israel convey tumah by zivah and idolaters do not convey tumah by zivah, but a decree has been enacted against them that they should be regarded as zavim in all respects (even when they did not experience any discharge).* [*Accordingly, they should also be subject to the laws of tumah through carrying – the same way that a zav is!?*]

Rather, Rabbah answers the difficulty according to his reasoning, as follows: An idolater and an idolatress - they themselves, their *hesset*, and their ‘placed stone’ are all *tamei*; an idol - it and its *hesset* are *tamei*, but not its ‘placed stone.’ Rabbi Akiva says: An idol - it, its *hesset* and its ‘placed stone’ are all *tamei*. Rabbi Elozar, however interprets it in accordance with his view: An idolater and an idolatress – they themselves, their *hesset*, and their ‘placed stone’ are all *tamei*; an idol - it is *tamei*, but not its *hesset*. Rabbi Akiva says: An idol - it and its *hesset* are *tamei*.



Rav Ashi asked on this explanation: If so, what is the meaning of 'they themselves'? [If 'hesset' means through carrying, what is meant by 'they'? It cannot mean that they themselves are tamei, since that is obvious from the fact that they generate tumah through being carried!]

Rather, said Rav Ashi: This is the meaning: In the case of an idolater and an idolatress, whether they carry others (what is known as *tumas hesset*) or others carry them (the regular *tumas masa*), these others are *tamei*. If an idol carries others, they are *tahor* (for the analogy between idols and *sheretz* excludes idols from the laws of *hesset*); if others carry it, they are *tamei* (through *tumas masa*, derived from the analogy between idols and *niddah*). As for its service utensils, whether they carry others or others carry them, these others are *tahor*. Rabbi Akiva said: In the case of an idolater and an idolatress (where there is an analogy to the tumah of a *zav*), and an idol (where there is an analogy to the tumah of a *niddah*), whether they carry others or others carry them, these others are *tamei*; as for its service utensils, whether they carry others or others carry them, they are *tahor*.

The *Gemora* asks: In the case of an idol, as for others carrying it, that is well, for it is possible; but how is it conceivable for it (an inanimate object) to carry others?

Rami the son of Rav Yeva said: It is as we learned in the following *Mishna*: If a *zav* is in one pan of the scales, and food or liquids are in the other pan, and the *zav* outweighs them, they are *tamei* (for the *zav* is supporting them; this is *tumas hesset*); if they outweigh him, they are *tahor* (for *tumas midras* – the tumah of couch and seat, only applies to objects which are designated to support the weight of a human; this excludes food and liquids; they also will not be *tamei* through *masa*, for a person that carries a *zav* will be *tamei*, not objects). [This teaching proves to us that *tumas hesset* is not only for carrying objects, but also for supporting them, and therefore, an idol, although incapable of 'carrying' something, for it is inanimate, it can

in fact 'support' something.]

The *Gemora* asks: With whom does that which was taught in this *braisa* agree: As for all *tamei* things which carry others (e.g., through a scale), they (the things carried) are *tahor*, except in the case of *hesset* by a *zav*, for which no companion is found in the whole Torah. Shall we say that this is not according to Rabbi Akiva, for if it is in accordance with Rabbi Akiva, there is an idol as well?

The *Gemora* answers: You may even say that it agrees with Rabbi Akiva, for the *braisa* states *zav* and all that is similar to him (and since idols are analogous to a *zav*, they too can generate *tumas hesset*).

Rav Chama bar Gurya inquired: Does the law of (*tumah from*) an idol operate in respect of its limbs or not?

The *Gemora* elaborates: Now, where an unskilled person can reassemble it (the limb in the idol), there is no question, for it is as though it is already joined. When does the question arise? If an unskilled person cannot reassemble it, what then? Since an unskilled person cannot reassemble it, it is as if it is broken (and therefore cannot generate *tumah*), or perhaps, it is actually not diminished (and therefore, it can still generate *tumah*)?

The *Gemora* notes: There were some who put the inquiry in the reverse direction: Where an unskilled person cannot reassemble it, there is no question, for it is as if it was broken. When does the question apply? It is where an unskilled person can reassemble it; what then? Since an unskilled person can reassemble it, it is as though it is already joined; or perhaps, now it is nevertheless disjoined and dismantled? The *Gemora* leaves this question unresolved (as a *teiku*).

Rav Achadvoi bar Ami inquired: What of an idol less than an olive in size?

Rav Yosef asked: Regarding what law is he asking? Shall we

say it is in respect of the prohibition (*to benefit from an idol*); let it be no more than Zevuv the idol of Ekron (*which was smaller than the size of an olive, and nevertheless, it was forbidden for benefit*), for it was taught in the following *braisa*: *And they made Baal-beris their God*; this refers to Zevuv the idol of Ekron. It teaches us that everyone made a likeness of that which he feared (*Zevuv*), and put it in his purse; whenever he thought of it, he took it out of his purse and embraced and kissed it!

Rather, the question is in respect of *tumah*; what is the law? Since it is analogous to *sheretz*, then just as *sheretz* generates *tumah* by the size of a lentil, so too an idol generates *tumah* by the size of a lentil; or perhaps it is also analogous to a corpse: just as a corpse generates *tumah* by the size of an olive, so too does an idol generates *tumah* by the size of an olive?

Rav Avya, and others state, Rabbah bar Ulla, said: Come and hear a proof from the following *braisa*: An idol less than an olive in size has no *tumah* at all, for it is written: *And he (King Yoshiyahu) cast its dust (of the idol) upon the graves of the people (who worshipped it)*: just as a corpse generates *tumah* by the size of an olive, so too does an idol generates *tumah* by the size of an olive.

[*The Gemora returns to R' Elozar's explanation of the Tannaic dispute, and asks:*] Now, according to the Rabbis, in respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a *sheretz*? It is that it does not generate *tumah*. And in respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a *niddah*? It is that it is not a source of *tumah* through its severed limbs. And in respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a corpse? It is that it does not generate *tumah* by the size of a lentil.

[*The Gemora notices that each of these three analogies all teaches a leniency.*] The *Gemora* asks: Why? Interpret it rather stringently, as follows: In respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a *sheretz*? It is that it generates *tumah* by the size of a lentil. And in respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a *niddah*? It is that it generates

tumah through a placed stone. And in respect of what law is it (*an idol*) analogous to a corpse? It is that it generates *tumah* through *tumas ohel* (*if the tumah source and a person or object is under the same roof*)?

The *Gemora* answers: The *tumah* of an idol is only by Rabbinical law, and consequently, where there are lenient and stringent analogies (*i.e., there is a choice as to which analogy to draw*), we draw a lenient analogy, but do not draw a stringent analogy. (83a – 83b)