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Mishna

Every hand that makes frequent examination is in the case of women praiseworthy (*since she will thereby be saved from causing taharos to become tamei, and she will prevent her husband from cohabiting with a niddah*), but in the case of men (*who are checking to see if they became a baal kerī – one who experiences a seminal emission*), it ought to be cut off (*for this can lead to arousal, which may cause him to violate the transgression of wasting semen*). (13a)

Discharge in Vain

The *Gemora* explains the difference between women and men: Women do not experience a sensation (*when examining themselves*); therefore, they are praiseworthy. Men, on the other hand, do not experience a sensation; therefore, their hands ought to be cut off.

The *Gemora* asks: But if so, why did the *Mishna* say ‘that makes frequent,’ seeing that the same reason would apply as well where the examinations are infrequent?

The *Gemora* answers: ‘Frequent examinations’ was mentioned in reference to women only (*that for them it is praiseworthy; for men, even one examination is forbidden*).

A *Tanna* taught: This (*that a male examination is forbidden*) applies only to an examination for semen, but as regards to *zov* (*examining if he had flow – similar to a seminal emission, one that would render him a zav*), a man also is as praiseworthy as the women. And even in regard to the emission of semen, if he makes the examination with a stone or with a pottery shard, he may do so.

The *Gemora* asks: May he not, however, do it with a soft cloth, seeing that it was taught in a *braisa*: A man may examine himself with a cloth or with any other thing he wishes?

The *Gemora* answers: As Abaye stated elsewhere: With a thick cloth; so also here, it may be explained that a thick cloth is used (*in order to prevent arousal*).

The *Gemora* notes in what connection Abaye’s statement was originally made: If a *Kohen*, while eating *terumah*, felt that his limbs were shaking (*a sign that is emitting semen*), he takes hold of his organ (*in order to prevent the semen from exiting; he is therefore not regarded as tamei*) and swallows the *terumah*. The *Gemora* asked on that: May he take hold of his organ? But, it was taught in a *braisa*: Rabbi Eliezer said: Whoever holds his organ while urinating is as though he had brought a flood upon the world? To this Abaye replied that he should take hold of his organ with a thick cloth.

Rava had answered: It may even be referring to a soft cloth, (*but it is permitted*) for once the semen has been uprooted, it is uprooted (*and the semen will have been wasted anyway*).

Abaye disagrees, for he is concerned that additional semen might be wasted (*if he becomes aroused*).

Rava, the *Gemora* notes, is not concerned about the increase of semen.

The *Gemora* asks: But does he not concern himself for this, seeing that it was taught in a *braisa*: To what may this (*the way in which the semen leaves the body*) be compared? It is to the putting of a finger into the eye where, as long as the finger remains in it, the eye continues to tear? [*Evidently, additional semen can be emitted!?*]

The *Gemora* answers: Rava holds that it is quite uncommon for one to get aroused twice in the same time frame (*and since that Mishna was referring to a case where he began to ejaculate, it is uncommon for it to happen again*).

It was stated above: Rabbi Eliezer said: Whoever holds his organ while urinating is as though he had brought a flood upon the world. They said

to Rabbi Eliezer: Wouldn't the droplets (*of urine*) drip on his feet (*if he does not hold his organ*) and he would appear to be a *kerus shafchah* (*one who has a cut organ*), so that he would be the cause of casting upon his children the reflection of being *mamzerim* (*for a kerus shafchah cannot father children*)!? He answered them: It is preferable that a man should be the cause of casting upon his children the reflection of being *mamzerim* than that he should make himself a wicked man, even for a moment, before the Omnipresent.

Another *braisa* was taught as follows: Rabbi Eliezer replied to them: It is possible for a man to stand on a raised spot and to urinate or to urinate in loose earth (*which will prevent the drops from splattering onto his feet*), and thus avoid making himself wicked, even for a moment, before the Omnipresent.

The *Gemora* inquires: Which reply did he tell them first? It cannot be that it was the first mentioned statement that he gave them first, for it is illogical that after he spoke to them of a prohibition (*regarding holing one's organ*), would he then offer a remedy (*implying that where the remedy is inapplicable, the prohibition may be disregarded*)? It must be that it was the last mentioned statement that he gave them first, and when they asked him, "What is he to do when he cannot find a raised spot or loose earth," he answered them that it is preferable that a man should be the cause of casting upon his children the reflection of being *mamzerim* than that he should make himself a wicked man, even for a moment, before the Omnipresent.

The *Gemora* explains the necessity of all these precautions: It is because otherwise, one might discharge semen in vain, and Rabbi Yochanan stated: Whoever discharges semen in vain is liable to death, for it is written: *And that which he (Onan, Yehudah's son) did was evil in the eyes of Hashem, and He caused him to die also.*

Rabbi Yitzchak and Rabbi Ami said. One who discharges semen in vain is as though he shed blood.

Rav Assi said: It is like one who worships idols.

The *Gemora* relates: Rav Yehudah and Shmuel once stood upon the roof of the synagogue of Shaf-VeYasif in Nehardea. Rav Yehudah to Shmuel, "I need to urinate." "Sharp one," Shmuel replied, "Take hold of your organ and urinate outside the roof" (*for the roof of a synagogue is holy*).

The *Gemora* asks: But how could he do so, seeing that it was taught: Rabbi Eliezer said: Whoever holds his organ while urinating is as though

he had brought a flood upon the world.

Abaye replied: He treated this case as that of a marauding band of soldiers, concerning which we learned in a *Mishna*: A marauding band of soldiers enters a city; if it is peacetime, any open wine barrels are prohibited, since they may have libated it, but closed barrels are permitted. If it is wartime, all barrels are permitted, since the soldiers have no opportunity to libate the wine. Evidently, since they are in a state of fear they do not think of offering libations, and so also in this case, since he was in a state of fear, he would not think impure thoughts.

The *Gemora* asks: But what fear could there be here?

The *Gemora* suggests several possible answers: *

The fear of the night and of the roof.

* The fear of his teacher.

* The fear of the *Shechinah* (*Divine Presence*).

* The fear of his Master (*Hashem*) that was always upon him, for Shmuel once remarked of him: This man is not one born from a woman (*and he therefore could have held his organ anywhere*).

* He was a married man, and concerning such, Rav Nachman ruled: If a man was married, this is permitted (*for he has "bread in his basket"*).

* Shmuel taught him that which Abba, the son of Rabbi Binyamin bar Chiya said: He may support the testicles from below (*for this will not cause arousal*).

* He taught him that which Rabbi Avahu stated in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: It (*the organ*) has a limit; from the corona downward (*away from the body*), it is permitted (*for contact with that area does not cause one to become aroused*), but from the corona upwards, it is forbidden.

Rav said: A man who willfully arouses himself should be excommunicated.

The *Gemora* asks: But why didn't he simply say that it is forbidden?

The *Gemora* answers: It is because (*it is so serious that*) the man incites his Evil Inclination against himself.

Rabbi Ami said: He is called a transgressor, because this is the scheme of the Evil Inclination, who one day tells a person do this, and the next day instructs him to do something else, and ultimately the Evil Inclination convinces one to worship idols.

There are others who say that Rabbi Ami said: He who brings himself by lustful thoughts will not be allowed to enter the division of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

Rabbi Elozar stated: Who are referred to in the Scriptural verse: *Your hands are full of blood*? It refers to those that commit promiscuous acts with their hands (*and discharge semen in vain*).

It was taught at the school of Rabbi Yishmael: "You shall not be promiscuous" implies that you shall not act promiscuously either with your hand or with your foot.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Converts and those that play with children delay the advent of the Messiah.

The *Gemora* explains: The statement about converts may be understood according to the view of Rabbi Chelbo, for Rabbi Chelbo said: Converts are as harmful to the Jewish people as *sapachas* (a type of *tzara'as*). What, however, could be meant by 'those that play with children'? It cannot be referring to those that perform homosexual acts with children, for those people are subject to stoning. It cannot be referring to those that discharge semen in vain through external contact (*with the limbs of the children*), for those people deserve destruction by flood? It must therefore be referring to those that marry minor girls who are not yet capable of bearing children, for Rabbi Yosi stated: The son of David will not come until all the souls are vacated from *guf*. [*There exists a chamber in heaven that contains the souls created during the six days of creation. The mitzvah of procreation is to bring the souls out of guf and advance the coming of Mashiach.*] This is as the verse says: [*For I will not forever fight, and I will not be upset for eternity*] *for the spirits before Me I will wrap (into a body), and I make the souls.*

The *Mishna* had stated: But in the case of men (*who are checking to see if they became a baal keri – one who experiences a seminal emission*), it ought to be cut off (*for this can lead to arousal, which may cause him to violate the transgression of wasting semen*).

They inquired: Have we here learned a law (*that it should actually be cut off*) or merely a curse? The *Gemora* explains: Have we here learned a law, as in the case where Rav Huna cut off one's hand (*for the Gemora stated that he who raises his hand against his fellow, even if he did not smite him, is called a wicked man, and Rav Huna said: His hand should be cut off, and Rav Huna actually once had the hand cut off of someone who was constantly striking other people*), or is it merely meant as a

curse?

The *Gemora* attempts to prove this from the following *braisa*: Rabbi Tarfon said: If his hand touched his organ, let his hand be cut off while it is upon his belly. They said to him: Would not his belly be split? He replied: It is preferable that his belly shall be split rather than that he should go down into the pit of destruction. Now, if you concede that we have here learned a law, one can well understand why they said that his belly would be split, but if you maintain that we have only learned of a curse, what could be meant by the question that his belly be split?

The *Gemora* rejects the proof: And according to as you suggest - that we have learned here a law, would it not suffice that the cutting off of his hand shall not be done on his belly?

Rather, this is the explanation of the *braisa*: Rabbi Tarfon meant that whoever places his hand below his belly - let it be cut off. They said to him: If a thorn was stuck in his belly, should he not remove it? Rabbi Tarfon replied: No. But, they retorted, wouldn't his belly split (*if the thorn remains lodged there*)? He replied: It is preferable that his belly shall be split rather than that he should go down into the pit of destruction. (13a – 13b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Converts are like Sapachas

Rabbi Chelbo said: Converts are as harmful to the Jewish people as *sapachas* (a type of *tzara'as*).

Rashi explains that this is because converts are not so meticulous in the performance of mitzvos, and those Jews who observe this behavior will become influenced by them.

Tosfos writes that each and every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow, and if converts do not perform mitzvos meticulously, they will be punished on account of them.

Tosfos rejects this explanation, for he proves that when the Jewish people accepted to be guarantors for each other, they did not accept to be guarantors for the converts as well.

Tosfos brings another explanation: They are harmful to the Jews, for it is impossible that someone will not bother them, and the punishment for this will be severe, for the Torah in twenty-four places warn the



Jewish people not to bother the converts.

Tosfos brings another explanation: It is because of the converts that we are still in exile, for the Gemora says that Klal Yisroel are scattered all over the world much more so than other nations in order for there to be additional converts.

Rabbeinu Avraham the convert explains differently: It is because the converts are meticulous in their performance of the mitzvos. This shows the shortcomings of ordinary Jews.

DAILY MASHAL

Souls from the Guf

Rav Assi said: "The son of David will not come until all the souls are vacated from guf." (There exists a chamber in heaven that contains the souls created during the six days of creation. The mitzvah of procreation is to bring the souls out of guf and advance the coming of Mashiach. One who has children fulfills this obligation even if they subsequently die.)

The Maharal writes that the souls which descend into this world before the Redemption are contained in a chamber called guf, body. This is because the souls residing in this world prior to the arrival of Mashiach have a connection to the body, the physical world. After the arrival of Mashiach, the souls will not be embedded inside the body; rather, they will be separate from the body.

The uniqueness and sacred status of the Deshaf Veyashiv Synagogue

By: Meoros HaDaf HaYomi

Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote his Shulchan 'Aruch as a decisive halachic work for everyone. Therefore, there are few places where he writes "we have a doubt". One of the few halachos where he has a doubt as to how one should behave concerns the halachos of a synagogue (O.C. 151:12), where he writes that we are in doubt if the roof of a synagogue may be used for mundane purposes. This doubt already arose with the Rishonim, the Mordechai (Shabbos, Ch. 1) and the Maharik (Responsa, in shoresh 161), who discussed if the sanctity of a synagogue, regarded as a small Temple, extends to its roof just as the sanctity of the heichal in the Temple included its roof, or perhaps the halachah of a synagogue is like that of the 'azarah (forecourt) in the Temple, which was sacred but not its roofs or upper floors.

Our sugya recounts that Shmuel and his pupil, Rav Yehudah, went up on the roof of the Deshaf Veyasiv Synagogue in Nehardea. They conversed, and Shmuel's words indicated that where they were standing they shouldn't worry about thoughts of sin as being in that place makes one feel scared and fearful and that keeps away such thoughts – one reason being the fear of the Shechinah present there. Can we decide Shulchan Aruch's doubt from this case and contend that the roofs of synagogues are sacred? Once we realize the uniqueness of this synagogue, we'll realize that it's almost impossible.

A synagogue from Yerushalayim: The synagogue we are discussing was called Deshaf Veyasiv. Rashi comments (s.v. Deshaf veyasiv): "The name of a place included in the kingdom of Nehardea". However, from other places in the Talmud where the synagogue is mentioned we learn that it was no ordinary synagogue at all. The Gemara in Megilah 29a says that the presence of the Shechinah in Babylonia was unique to this synagogue. The Shechinah's voice was heard there and administering angels surrounded it. Rashi comments (ibid; Rosh HaShanah 24b; 'Avodah Zarah 43b) that when Yechonyah, the king of Judea, was exiled to Babylonia, he brought along stones and earth from Yerushalayim and built this synagogue with them. Its name – Deshaf Veyasiv – derives from the fact that it "jumped" (shaf) from Yerushalayim and "settled" (yasiv) in Babylonia. Yechonyah's act followed his moving parting from the Temple before his exile, of which we have learnt recently in tractate Midos (35b).

It is amazing to discover that while Rashi mentions that the synagogue was built of stones from Yerushalayim, in the 'Aruch (in the entry for shaf) and the Geonim's Responsa (71) it is mentioned that the synagogue was built with stones from the Temple! (See Responsa Chasam Sofer, Y.D. 264, where he wrote that we must say that their sanctity was desecrated by the conquest and destruction for if not so, there's a prohibition of me'ilah).

Once we realize the special sanctity of the Deshaf Veyasiv Synagogue, it is easy to understand why the Rishonim and Shulchan 'Aruch didn't derive a decision from our Gemara, for this synagogue was especially sacred. Indeed, the Maharsha writes (in Chidushei Agados) that thoughts of sin were prevented in this synagogue due to its uniqueness and he defines its sanctity as "like in the Temple"!