



Volume 6. Issue 22

The spread of Tumah

The *Mishnah* (7:3) discusses the spread of *tumah* from a corpse in a house with more than one exit. If the exits contain recessed doors, then the areas under the lintels are treated as part of the house and the *tumah* spreads to utensils that are situated in these doorways. If the doors are closed, *tumah* will still be transmitted, but only through the exit through which the corpse will be removed. If it is not yet known which exit will be used, *tumah* will be transmitted to utensils in all of the exits. This principle is known as *sof tumah latzeit*.

When the decision is made to use a particular exit, any other closed exits will no longer transmit *tumah*. However, *Beit Shammai* say that this principle only applies if this decision is made before the person dies. If it is made after the person dies, the doorways remain *tamei*. The only way the *tamei* status can be removed is if a physical act is done; opening the selected door is such an act (*Bartenura*). According to *Beit Hillel*, the other exits become *tahor* as soon as the decision not to use them as the exit is made, even without an action. If a *tahor* utensil was then placed in one of the other exits, it would remain *tahor*.

A *Mishnah* learnt in the previous *masechet* appears to be relevant to this *machloket*. The *Mishnah* (*Keilim* 25:9) states: "All utensils descend into impurity through intention, but ascend from impurity only through a physical alteration." The intention to use an object for a particular purpose is sufficient to render it susceptible to *tumah*¹. However if that intention subsequently changes, the object remains susceptible to *tumah*. There must be a physical alteration to remove the susceptibility to *tumah*. Until a physical alteration is made, we are concerned that the person might change their mind (*Mishnah Achronah* to *Keilim* 27:4).

It seems that *Beit Shammai* applies the same principle to the case of our *Mishnah*. Until the person performs an action such as opening the door, *Beit Shammai* is concerned that the person will change his mind. *Beit Hillel*, on the other hand, is not concerned that the person will change his mind. As soon as the person decides to use a particular exit to remove the corpse, the *tamei* status is removed from the other exits. It follows that the *machloket* between *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* only relates to the time at which

the *tamei* status is removed from the other exits. According to *Beit Hillel*, this occurs when the decision is made to use a particular exit. According to *Beit Shammai*, this occurs when the selected door is actually opened.

However, the *Gemara* (*Beitzah* 10a) explains that the *machloket* between *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* may go even further. Apparently, the *machloket* might also concern the principle of *breirah* (retroactive clarification) (*Rashi*). The *Gemara* discusses the status of a utensil placed in a doorway before the decision was made to use another doorway. When the decision is made to use another doorway, does the utensil remain *tamei*, or does it become retroactively *tahor*? According to *Beit Shammai* the principle, of *breirah* is not valid. The utensils in the doorways become *tamei* at the moment of death and they remain *tamei* even after the decision is made to use another doorway.

The *Gemara* gives 2 interpretations of *Beit Hillel's* opinion:

- (a) According to *Rabbah* and *R' Oshaya*, *Beit Hillel* holds that the decision to remove the corpse through a particular door makes the other exits *tahor*, but only from that time on. Utensils that were already in the other doorways before the decision is made remain *tamei*. This would accord with the ruling of *Beit Shammai* apart from the difference as to what constitutes a sufficient trigger to change the status of the doorways not chosen for the corpse's exit.
- (b) According to *Rava*, *Beit Hillel* holds that the decision to remove the corpse through a particular door makes the other doorways *tahor* retroactively. *Rava* interprets this to mean that utensils that are in the other doorways also become *tahor* at the time the decision is made, based on the principle of *breirah*.

In general, whether or not *breirah* is a valid principle is a *machloket* raised in a number of places in the *Gemara*. The above analysis suggests that *Beit Shammai* does not accept the principle of *breirah* while according to *Rava*, *Beit Hillel* accepts the principle of *breirah* as valid. According to *Rabbah* and *R' Oshaya* it would appear that both *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* agree that the principle of *breirah* is not valid, at least in this instance.

Allon Ledder

¹ The same object can be susceptible to *tumah* or not, depending on the purpose for which the object is to be used. Eg. A ring for use by a person

is susceptible to *tumah*. The same ring, if it is for the use of an animal, is not susceptible to *tumah*.

Revision Questions

אהלות ו: ד- ח: ד'

- What is the law regarding *tumah* found in the wall between two houses? (ו: ד')
- Explain the debate regarding the status of the *ma'aziva*? (ו: ד')
- What is the law regarding *tumah* that is found *bein ha'korot*? (Provide all three cases.) (ו: ה')
- What is the law regarding a "house that serves a wall"? (ו: ו') (Compare with how a "wall that serves a house"). (ו: ג')
- What is the law regarding a case where *tumah* is found beneath a pillar? (ו: ו')
- Explain the debate regarding the utensils found beneath the overhanging decorations of the pillar. (ו: ו')
- Regarding the previous question, in what case is there no debate? (ו: ו')
- What is the law regarding *tumah* found in cupboards built into the wall? (ו: ו')
- When does *tumah* found in a wall cause all the floors in the building to become *tameh*? (ו: א')
- In what case would the spread be stopped? (ו: א')
- When would one touch the side of a *matezeiva* be *tameh* and when would he be *tahor*? (ו: א')
- Is the space under the slanted part of an *ohel* considered part of the *ohel*? (ו: ב')
- What is the difference if one touches the inside or outside of an *ohel* once the corpse has been removed? (ו: ב')
- What is the law regarding a case where a half *kezayit* was on one side of the *ohel* and another on the other side? (ו: ב')
- What is the law regarding *tumah* that is found under that excess flap of a tent? (ו: ב')
- Explain the debate regarding a tent placed over an *arubah*? (ו: ב')
- What is the law regarding item in the closed doorways of a house that contains a corpse? When does this change? (ו: ג')
- What are the two debates between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* regarding the previous question? (ו: ג')
- Explain the debate regarding a case where a woman miscarries after she was transferred between rooms during labour? (ו: ד')
- In what case is the ruling different? (ו: ה')
- Until what point is a baby aborted when it is threatening the mother's life? (ו: ו')
- List some items that can spread *tumah* and shield against *tumah*. (ו: א')
- What are *sechachot*? (ו: ב')
- What are *pera'ot*? (ו: ב')
- List some items that can spread *tumah* but cannot shield against *tumah*. (ו: ג')
- List some items that can shield against *tumah* but cannot spread *tumah*. (ו: ד')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

After maariv

Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before mincha

Mizrachi Shul

Next Week's Mishnayot...

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | שבת קודש |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 19 th July כ"ז תמוז | 20 th July כ"ח תמוז | 21 st July כ"ט תמוז | 22 nd July א' אב | 23 rd July ב' אב | 24 th July ג' אב | 25 th July ד' אב |
| Ohalot 8:5-6 | Ohalot 9:1-2 | Ohalot 9:3-4 | Ohalot 9:5-6 | Ohalot 9:7-8 | Ohalot 9:9-10 | Ohalot 9:11-12 |

