



Volume 6. Issue 12

The Impurity of Wooden Vessels

At the beginning of the second chapter of *Keilim* we learn:

Wooden utensils... when flat are pure, and when containers are impure.

In other words: only wooden vessels that can serve as receptacles can contract impurity, while if they are flat they are not susceptible to impurity - like vessels made of rock. (The exception is a wooden mattress or any other wooden objects one commonly lies on, the source of which is a unique *passuk*).

While this seems quite clear, many *Rishonim* hold that this is not so, based on the *Torat Kohanim* and other sources which we shall see, and this issue of the possible impurity of wooden vessels becomes a matter of great debate. Let us mention 3 sources, from which one can imply that wooden vessels can and indeed become impure:

1. The *Gemara* in *Bava Batra* (66a) tells us that flat wooden utensils contract impurity by way of rabbinic decree. So although there is no Torah-based impurity, there is a rabbinically-based one.
2. There is a discussion in the *Torat Kohanim* which deals with the issue of flat wooden utensils, and states that although we generally hold that they do not contract impurity, if they serve things that serve man (like a table facilitates a plate used by people) - they also can become impure.

3. This week we read a *Mishnah* (18:9) from which the *Tosafot* (*Sukkah* 16a) and *Ritva* there (*Sukkah* 12b) infer that wooden flat utensils can become impure. The *Mishnah* teaches that a bed becomes pure and impure in the same way: Meaning, if it became impure fully constructed it can only be purified in the same way, and if it became impure when it was disassembled then it can only become pure in that way. Since beds are made of wood, it is interesting that we learn that even when it is not assembled - hence: not usable - it still can become impure.¹

Generally, we find three opinions in the *Rishonim* regarding what the *Halacha* is:

- (a) The *Rashbam* claims that there is no impurity for wooden utensils, at all. The *Gemara* in *Bava Batra* is according to a singular opinion; the *Torat Kohanim* is overruled by the *Gemara*; and our *Mishnah* can be explained as talking about a bed made from other materials.
- (b) The *Tosafot* adopt the view of the *Torat Kohanim*, as stated earlier.
- (c) *Rambam* appears to interpret the *Torat Kohanim* in saying that any wide wooden utensil can become rabbinically impure.

Rav Yonatan Rosensweig

¹ Ed Note: This is one understanding of our *Mishnah* based on the *Tosefta*. Others explain the basic meaning of the *Mishnah* differently. (See the *Tifferet Yisrael*, for example, for more detail.)

Revision Questions

כלים י"ח: ט' – כ': ג'

- What is the law regarding a *tameh* bed, of which half was stolen? (י"ח: ט')
- What is the law if the half was returned and the bed was put together again? (י"ח: ט')
- Explain the debate between *R' Eliezer* and the *Chachamim* regarding how a bed (constructed of parts) can become *tameh* and *tahor*. (י"ח: ט')
- If a *tameh* bed is dismantled, are the straps/ropes also *tameh*? (י"ט: א')
- At what point are the straps/ropes of a bed considered part of (*chibur*) the bed? (י"ט: א')
- Regarding the previous question, how much of those ropes would then be considered a *chibur*? (י"ט: א')
- How much of excess rope is hanging off a *tameh* bed is *tameh*? (י"ט: ב')
- What are the two reasons for the ruling described in the previous question? (י"ט: ב')
- What is the *mizran* of a bed, and how much of its excess hanging from a *tameh* bed is *tameh*? Include both opinions. (י"ט: ג')
- What two cases are brought as a practical difference between these two opinions? Explain. (י"ט: ד')
- What is the law regarding a *mizran* that was wrapped around a bed that was *tameh midras*? (י"ט: ה')
- What is the law if the *mizran* is removed? (י"ט: ה')
- What are the other two cases brought that are similar to the previous two questions? (י"ט: ה')
- What is the law regarding the bed and *mizran* where the *mizran* came into contact with a *shoretz* while attached, and was then removed? (י"ט: ו')
- Explain the following principle: (י"ט: ו')
שֶׁהַכֵּל הוֹלֵךְ אַחַר הַיְשָׁנוֹת
- What forms of *tumah* is a chest susceptible to if its opening is on its top? (י"ז: ט')
- If a chest is broken at which end is it no longer *tameh (tmei met)*? (י"ז: ט')
- In that case, what is the law regarding the drawers? (י"ז: ט')
- What other two cases are similar to the previous two questions? (י"ח: ט')
- What forms of *tumah* is a chest susceptible to if its opening is on its side? (י"ז: ט')
- What is the law if that chest breaks at the top? (י"ז: ט')
- Explain the debate if that chest breaks at the bottom. (י"ז: ט')
- What other case is debated in a similar manner? (י"ז: ט')
- Which of the following (leather) items if they break are still *tameh midras*: (כ': א')
 - Mattress?
 - Pillow?
 - *Klutar*?
 - *Turmel*?
 - Sacks?
- Which trough is the subject of debate between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*? Explain. (כ': ב')
- How are the remnants of wooden utensils more strict than original utensils? (כ': ב')
- What are the two cases that are considered a: *חיבור בשעת מלאכה*: (כ': ג')
- What is the reason why if a chair is formed at the end of a beam of an olive press it is not susceptible to *tumat midras*? (כ': ג')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday
Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat
10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
10 th May ט"ז אייר	11 th May י"ז אייר	12 th May י"ח אייר	13 th May י"ט אייר	14 th May כ' אייר	15 th May כ"א אייר	16 th May כ"ב אייר
Keilim 20:4-5	Keilim 20:6-7	Keilim 21:1-2	Keilim 21:3-22:1	Keilim 22:2-3	Keilim 22:4-5	Keilim 22:6-7

