

From time to time in his majestic commentary on Leviticus, the late Prof. Jacob Milgrom z'l, makes mention of the deep emotional world that one finds in the book. Sacrifices, for example,



"cover the gamut of psychological, emotional, and religious needs of the people." The same could be said for the laws regarding purity and impurity. In the biblical and rabbinic system, there are various levels of impurity, contact with the dead being the most severe. It's hard to imagine how someone could not be affected on some psychological or emotional level after coming into contact with a dead body. It shakes us deeply, no matter how much we might try to dissociate from it. Likewise, there are all sorts of **defiling** experiences that a person can have that can shake us up psychologically or emotionally: a burglary, an accident, an insult, or an act of physical or verbal assault against us. Similarly, in our online world, we can experience harassment in different forms ranging from nasty comments on our Facebook or Instagram feeds, to outright bullying. A whole cohort of Jewish kids on campus is currently experiencing a spasm of **defilement** of sorts, as they run a gauntlet of hate, hostility, and not-so-thinly-veiled antisemitism just to get to class. In the spirit of Jacob Milgrom, does Leviticus have any answers for that kind of **defilement**? Not directly of course. But as with other texts, a careful and close reading can often yield some very important wisdom that can apply to our psychological and spiritual lives. For example, this text, about the purification rituals that a kohen must undergo after contact with a source of impurity.

או איש אשר יגע בכל שרץ אשר יטמא לו או באדם אשר יטמא לו לכל טמאתו. נפש אשר תגע בו וטמאה עד הערב ולא יאכל מן הקדשים כי אם רחץ בשרו במים. וכא השמש וטהר ואחר יאכל מן הקדשים כי לחמו הוא.	...or a man that touches any swarming-thing through which he becomes-tamei, or a human through which he becomes-tamei, whatever his tum'a— the person who touches it is to remain-tamei until sunset, he is not to eat of the holy-donations unless he washes his flesh in water; when the sun comes in, it is pure, afterward he may eat of the holy-donations, for they are his food. (Lev. 22:5-7)
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We should point out that the primary role of the

kohanim was to preserve the sanctity of the Tabernacle, so that God's presence would be constant among the people. To that end, the kohanim had to be punctilious about their state of purity and impurity (**tum'a** and **tahara**) in order to operate in the sanctuary and perform their sacred duties. As a form of compensation, they were entitled to eat certain

foods that were brought to the sanctuary as sacred gifts. These are the **קדשים-kodoshim-holy donations**. In order to eat them, the kohanim have to be in a state of ritual purity. There are many circumstances that can render someone impure, such as **צָרַעַת-tzara'at-scale disease** (which was saw earlier in Vayikra), or other bodily events (see v. 22:4). In the verses cited earlier, (22:5-7) a person can become impure by accidentally coming into contact with a **שֶׁרֶץ-sheretz-swarming-thing** that is, a lizard, gecko, or other creepy crawlers. Why would physical contact with these animals render someone impure? We'll leave that for a future parasha sheet. However, despite the fact that some people keep them as pets, many people, including many of us, instinctively feel we have to wash after coming into contact with them because they are slimy, or because we believe that they are conveying germs. In other words, after coming into contact with something that we perceive to be **defiling**, we need to perform some kind of remedial activity in order to return ourselves to the previous **undefiled** state. In Lev. 22:5-7 however, we learn that there are two things that are required in order to achieve that transition from the **defiled** to the **undefiled** state, or from impure to pure: 1) you have to wash yourself, and, 2) you have to allow some time to elapse from the episode and experience a sunset, i.e., the transition of one day to the next. Both are necessary. Washing without a sunset? No good. Sunset without a washing? Also, no good. While these rules are arcane and are rooted in a different reality, in the spirit of Jacob Milgrom, there is much we can learn from them. When we feel physically, emotionally, or spiritually **defiled**, instinctively, we may feel that we have to take a bath or a shower, that is, to physically experience some kind of actual cleansing. But we also understand that in order to recover from the emotional turmoil, we need some time to elapse from the **defiling** episode. This is reflected in common parlance. We say things like, **it's going to take some time** or **time heals all wounds**. There is a whole line Hallmark cards on this theme. The passage of time sets the **defiling** event further and further in the past and the initial physiological stress that it triggered (elevated pulse, blood pressure, etc.) subsides. Sunset is the closest thing that we experience to a daily emotional **reset**. Observing the subtle changes in light and color, we experience awe and recognize on whatever level, our place within creation. We instinctively re-encounter the deep rhythm of life through the experience of sunset. The first **beracha** of the **Ma'ariv** service evokes this beautifully:

אֲשֶׁר בִּדְבָרוֹ מַעְרִיב עֲרֵבִים בְּחֻמָּהּ פֹּתַח שְׁעִים וּבִתְבוּנָה מְשַׁנָּה עֵתִים
וּמַחְלִיף אֶת־הַיָּמִים וּמַסְדֵּר אֶת־הַכּוֹכָבִים בְּמִשְׁמְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרָקִיעַ כְּרֻצּוֹ:
בּוֹרֵא יוֹם וְלַיְלָה גּוֹלָל אֹר מִלְּפָנֵי חֹשֶׁךְ וְחֹשֶׁךְ מִלְּפָנֵי אֹר וּמַעְבִּיר יוֹם וּמַבְיֵא
לַיְלָה וּמַבְדִּיל בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה....

With His word He brings on evenings, with wisdom He opens the gates (of heaven); and with understanding changes the times and alternates the seasons, and

arranges the stars in their watches, in the sky, according to His will. He creates day and night, He rolls the light away from before darkness, and darkness from before light; He causes day to pass and brings night, and separates between day and night...

In the opening pages of the first tractate of the Talmud, Berakhot, (the tractate that mostly deals with prayer and blessings) the rabbis discuss the idea of time and purification as they examine Lev. 22:7. They ask: What does it mean when the text says: **וְכָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנָטָה - And the sun sets and it is purified.** Answer: It means that **the day is pure** - no residue of the day remains, as people say colloquially: **אֵינֶרֶב שָׁמַיְשָׁא וְאֵדְכִי יוֹמָא. The sun has set and the day is purified.** Common cultural expressions reflect common cultural wisdom. And here the idea is that once the day is over, **the day itself has been purified.** As one commentator puts it, **the air will clear, and the stars will emerge** (Rav Hai Gaon). Night **resets** everything and we experience a psychological and emotional **reset** as well. In the ancient world, sunset was the clearest marker of the passage of time. All creatures, plant and animal, are attuned to the diurnal rhythm marked by sunset. Allowing for the passage of time by waiting for sunset, enables us to recalibrate our diurnal rhythm in the aftermath of a physical or spiritual disruption or **defilement**. That, coupled with washing, structures the individual's psychological and emotional transition from the zone of **impurity** to the zone of **purity**.

On Bathing and Immersing. A young scholar, Elisheva Malomet, (BA '24) has written an illuminating study entitled, *The Practice of Bathing and Immersing in Water in Biblical and Rabbinic Narrative* in which she explains the literary and spiritual significance of these acts: **The root נ-ח-י implies bathing/washing of a body/object in and with a fluid. Whereas ט-ב-ל suggests immersing or dipping a body/object in fluid with a downward motion. Both are used in the Hebrew Bible as the method by which a person becomes purified.** When we examine how those terms appear in different stories, we can see **bathing functions as an important literary motif** that signals a major transformation in a character. For example, in the story of David and Bathsheva, the narrator begins the story as follows:

וַיְהִי לַעֲתָה הָעָרֶב וַיָּקָם דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ וַיֵּתֶלֶךְ עַל גֵּג בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֵּרָא אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת מַעַל הַגֵּג וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מְרֹאֶה מְאֹד.

Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful...(2 Sam 11:2).

We notice that the bather is not named here. We also wonder if her bathing is just an ordinary act or an act of self-consecration. Notwithstanding either interpretation, her bathing sets in motion a series of events that will have momentous consequences for David and the monarchy. Bathing is the literary motif that signals her transformation from an anonymous woman in a bath on a roof, to

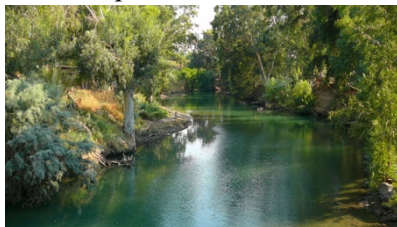
Bathsheva, a woman with a specific identity; from a woman who is passive, to a woman who exercises agency in her own destiny; a woman originally defined by her beauty, to a woman who will eventually be identified as the most influential woman in the Davidic court, the Queen Mother. It all started in a bath, with water. Thus, bathing is the motif of transformation. This theme appears again in the story of Naaman, the Aramean general whose body was covered with **tzara'at**-scale disease. When he seeks a cure for his disease, he is instructed by the prophet Elisha to go and **bathe in the Jordan**. The bathing in water not only cures him of his disease but it sets in motion a spiritual transformation for Naaman, akin to a conversion.



הַלֹּךְ וְרֹחֶצֶת שִׁבְעָה פְעָמִים בַּיַּרְדֵּן וְנֹשֵׁב בְּשָׂרָךְ לֶךְ וְנִטְהָר... וַיֵּרֶד וַיִּטְבַּל בַּיַּרְדֵּן שִׁבְעָה פְעָמִים כַּדְּבַר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וְנֹשֵׁב בְּשָׂרוֹ כַּבָּשָׂר נַעַר קָטָן וְנִטְהָר.

"Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be pure..." So he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, as the agent of God had bidden; and his flesh became like a little boy's, and he was pure. (2 Kings 5:10, 14)

While Naaman never formally joins the people of Israel, he promises that whenever he engages in sacrificial worship, he will only be directing himself to the God of Israel. The bathing motif is found in rabbinic literature as well. In one poignant story, Resh Lakish, a young gladiator sees someone bathing in the Jordan. He jumped into the water to pursue him, and the ensuing encounter was lifechanging. Resh Lakish discovered that the object of his pursuit was none other than Rabbi Yohanan, one of the foremost sages of his era. Rabbi Yohanan persuaded Resh Lakish to abandon his life of crime and adventure and pursue the study of Torah, and thus he became a great scholar. Bathing is the motif of transformation. At various moments in the Bible, ranging from the purification rituals of Leviticus or the later stories



of the prophets and kings, we come into contact with water.

(The Jordan River)

In post-biblical Judaism, immersion in water signals spiritual transformation, for women and men, for converts, penitents and seekers. In our own time, new rituals have incorporated immersion in water to enable individuals to experience a spiritual transformation or renewal from their episodes of **defilement**. Evolving from the rituals of Leviticus, they satisfy the deep psychological, emotional and religious needs of the people.

Shabbat Shalom!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Sharon Frant Brooks, Ken Brooks and Phyllis Frant Gunther to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Sharon and Phyllis' father, Milton Frant, z'l.

TODAY IS DAY 225. MAY THE HOSTAGES BE FREED!