

# The Weekly Daf



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Chullin 103-109

Week of 21-27 Kislev 5757 / 2-8 December 1996

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

## Which is Worse

The importance of washing hands before eating bread is dramatized by our Sages with an account of how the failure of a Jew to observe this mitzva of rabbinic origin led him to violate a much more serious Torah command

A Jewish innkeeper had a clientele of Jews and non-Jews. When a Jew entered he prepared kosher food for him and when a non-Jew appeared he served him non-kosher meat. One day a Jew entered and failed to wash for bread. Assuming him to be a non-Jew the innkeeper served him non-kosher meat.

There are two versions in the Talmud as to the nature of this non-kosher meat. One is that it was the meat of a kosher animal whose death was not by *shechita* and was therefore prohibited as *neveilah* (Devarim 14:21). Another view is that he was served swine meat.

Rashi points out that the consequences of the Jew's failure to wash his hands were more serious if it was swine meat rather than *neveilah* because in such a case he is guilty of two violations rather than one.

The background for this comment is the Midrash Toras Kohanim which Rashi cites in Parshas Shmini (Vayikra 11:3) on the passage which commands us to eat only those animals which have the proper identifying signs of cud chewing and split hoof. This is the Torah's way of telling us that if we eat the meat of a non-kosher species we are guilty of violating a positive command to restrict ourselves to kosher ones in addition to violating the negative command to avoid such animals which appears in the very next passage.

The practical ramification of this observation would be a case where someone's life is in danger and the only food available to save him are *neveilah* and swine. Following the rule stated in Mesechta Yoma (83a) that we must try to use the food with the least severe prohibition attached to it the choice on this case would be the *neveilah* with just a negative command rather than swine meat with its double prohibition.

Chullin 106a

## Which is Better?

Is someone required to wash his hands before eating bread even if he does not touch the bread but is being fed by someone else?

Before reaching its conclusion that washing is required in such a case as well the Talmud attempts to prove the opposite from a particular incident.

Rabbi Huna bar Sechora put some meat and bread into the mouth of Rabbi Hamnuna. "If you were not Rabbi Hamnuna (a man of great wisdom – Rashi)," he said to him, "I would not feed you this way."

The initial assumption of the Talmud is that Rabbi Hamnuna had not washed his hands before eating and Rabbi Huna was nevertheless feeding him bread because he knew that Rabbi Hamnuna was extremely careful in his observance of mitzvos and could be relied upon not to touch the food placed in his mouth. This would lead to the conclusion that if one is careful not to touch the bread placed in his mouth there is no need to wash.

But this assumption is rejected and an alternative scenario is suggested. Rabbi Huna would never have fed Rabbi Hamnuna unless he assumed that he had washed. Since he knew, however, that Rabbi Hamnuna was more than careful and was even zealous in his observance of mitzvos he felt he could safely assume that Rabbi Hamnuna had taken the precaution of washing before their encounter.

Rashi comments that the zealotry of taking precautionary measures to avoid getting into problematic situations is a greater virtue than the carefulness demonstrated when faced with such a situation. This is why Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair (Mesechta Avodah Zarah 80b), in his ladder of virtues which serves as the outline of Luzzato's classic "Mesilas Yesharim," states that "carefulness will bring one to zealotry."

Chullin 107b

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