



Tractate Keilim Chapter Twenty-four

מסכת כלים פרק עשרים וארבע

Introduction

Useable portable utensils are—with certain exceptions, as we shall see later—susceptible to ritual uncleanness. This means that if they come into contact with a source of ritual uncleanness—such as a human corpse, the body of certain dead animals—or they pass through a cemetery—they contract the uncleanness into themselves. If a person subsequently touches such a utensil, the person is forbidden to enter the temple, and if the utensil touches temple food, that food may not be eaten. The utensil remains in its unclean state until immersed in a Mikvah (ritualarium) or, in certain cases, until sprinkled with water mixed with ashes of the Red Heifer.

An important type of ritual uncleanness (Tumah) is 'Tumas Midrass' (Stepping uncleanness). A utensil used for stepping or any other supporting of one's weight - such as sitting or lying - will contract 'Stepping' uncleanness from the person supporting himself on the utensil (when that person, for whatever reason, is himself ritually unclean). This transfer of ritual uncleanness from person to utensil occurs even where there is no physical contact between the principles; such as where a sheet divides between the person and the utensil. However, this type of Tumah does not apply to all utensils. Only a utensil whose intended function is for support, such as a chair or bed, contracts 'Stepping' Tumah. A utensil that has a different function does not. Thus, if one overturns a pail and sits on it, 'Stepping' Tumah will not apply, as his sitting interferes with its normal use; it is therefore seen as not functioning for sitting. If, however, one sits atop a small cabinet which opens on the side, so that his sitting does not impede the use of the cabinet, the cabinet is considered to function also for sitting and will contract 'Stepping' Tumah.



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As we have seen with regard to Stepping Tumah, that not to every utensil will this Tumah apply, so too with regard to all Tumah, certain utensils are totally exempted from the laws of Tumah. Examples of this are large containers which, when filled, are too heavy to be carried, unfinished materials, such as sheets of leather from which strips will be cut or utensils with rough edges yet to be smoothed, and certain flat utensils which are unable to hold water.

Thus chapter 24, Mishnahs 1 through 16, sets out to classify three types of a large variety of utensils—shields, wagons, chests, and 13 others—each of which qualifies, respectively, for Stepping Tumah, general Tumah, or no Tumah at all. (The third type is termed 'Tahor', ritually clean.)

The final Mishnah in chapter 24—Mishnah 17—also deals with three types of utensils, but in a very different context. Namely, when two containers of different Tumah statuses are combined, what is the Tumah status of the new coupled utensil.



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Mishnah One: Three Shields

שַׁלְשָׁה There are three types of shields. The bent shield¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one used for war games² contracts corpse Tumah³, the Arabic joy [shield]⁴ is completely Tahor.

שַׁלְשָׁה תְּרִיסִין הֵם: תְּרִיס הַכְּפוּף – טְמֵא מִדְּרָס; וְשִׁמְשִׁחְקִין בּוֹ בְּקִנְפוֹן – טְמֵא טְמֵא מֵת; וְדִיצַת הָעֶרְבִיִּין – טְהוֹרָה מִכְּלוּם.

1. this would wrap around the body on three sides to provide protection in battle. Soldiers would also use this shield as a cot during war. 2. this was a flat shield used for war sports but was not used as a cot. 3. i.e., all other types of Tumah. See commentaries why corpse Tumah is mentioned specifically. 4. a small shield used by Arab children as a toy. Since it has no purposeful function it loses its status as a utensil and is Tahor.

Mishnah Two: Three Wagons

שַׁלְשָׁה There are three types of wagons. The one made [and used] like a chair¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one shaped like a bed² contracts corpse Tumah, the one used [to transport large] stones³ is completely Tahor.

שַׁלְשָׁה עֲגָלוֹת הֵן: הָעֵשׂוּיָה בְּקַתְדָּרָא – טְמֵאָה מִדְּרָס; בְּמִטָּה – טְמֵאָה טְמֵא מֵת; וְשַׁל אֲבָנִים – טְהוֹרָה מִכְּלוּם.

1. a type of wheelchair, perhaps with staves protruding forward connecting to a means of locomotion such as a person or an animal. 2. generally used to transport merchandise. A person using this wagon to sit or lie would be asked to vacate the wagon so that it could return its normal usage. 3. this had holes larger than the size of a pomegranate (the stones were larger still, and would not fall out through the holes), the general rule being that a utensil with holes of this size no longer qualifies to contract any Tumah.



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Mishnah Three: Three Kneading Bowls

שלוש There are three types of kneading bowls. A kneading bowl measuring between two Log and nine Kav that was cracked contracts Stepping Tumah¹, an unbroken one contracts corpse Tumah², one of [great] measure³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שלוש ערבות הן: ערבה משני לג ועד תשעה קבין שנסדקה - טמאה מדרס; שלמה - טמאה טמא מת; והבאה במדה - טהורה מכלום.

1. it can no longer be used for kneading and would be used for sitting. 2. if one sat on it he would be asked to rise and allow the bowl be used for its normal purpose. 3. i.e., of 40 or more Sa'ah (three or more cubic Amahs). 4. any utensil of this size is considered too large to contract Tumah.

Mishnah Four: Three Chests

שלוש There are three types of chests. A chest whose opening is on the side contracts Stepping Tumah¹, one whose opening is on top contracts corpse Tumah², one of [great] measure is completely Tahor³.

שלוש תבות הן: תבה שפתחה מצדה - טמאה מדרס; מלמעלן - טמאה טמא מת; והבאה במדה - טהורה מכלום.

1. the top of the chest would be used for sitting as this would not interfere with its opening which was located on the side. 2. sitting on top of this chest would obstruct access to the opening, which was also on top. 3. as in the previous Mishnah (notes 3 and 4).



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Mishnah Five: Three Tarbuses

שְׁלֵשָׁה There are three types of tarbuses¹. The one of saporim² contracts Stepping Tumah, the one upon which people eat³ contracts corpse Tumah⁴, the one used for olives⁵ is completely Tahor⁶.

שְׁלֵשָׁה תַּרְבוּסִין הֵן: שֶׁל סַפְרִין; – טָמֵא מִדָּרָס; וְשֶׁל שְׂאוֹכְלִין עָלָיו – טָמֵא טָמֵא מֵת; וְשֶׁל זֵיתִים – טָהוֹר מִכָּלֵוּם.

1. leather boxes (Ra'av); animal hides whose hair had not been removed (Tiferes Yisrael).
2. blood letters—this would be used for sitting (Ra'av); barbers—the person receiving the haircut would sit on this and it would catch the hair (Tiferes Yisrael).
3. i.e. where they place their food.
4. sitting on this tarbus interferes with using it for eating.
5. olives would be kept in or on this tarbus prior to their squeezing.
6. only utensils which serve a person directly—a table from which one eats, a knife with which he cuts, a chair upon which he sits—contract Tumah. The olive tarbus serves the 'olives' while they are uninvolved with a person.

Mishnah Six: Three Stands

שְׁלֵשָׁה There are three types of stands. The one placed near a bed¹ and the one used by scribes² contracts Stepping Tumah, the serving stand³ contracts corpse Tumah, the one which [holds up] a closet is completely Tahor⁴.

שְׁלֵשָׁה בְּסִסְיֹת הֵן: שְׁלִפְנֵי הַמִּטָּה, וְשֶׁלִּפְנֵי סוּפְרִים – טָמֵא מִדָּרָס; וְשֶׁל דְּלִפְקֵי – טָמֵא טָמֵא מֵת; וְשֶׁל מַגְדֵּל – טָהוֹר מִכָּלֵוּם.

1. and used for sitting.
2. the scribe would sit on this base while writing.
3. one would place platters and goblets on this stand prior to bringing them to the dining area; it would not function for sitting.
4. it serves the closet—not the person—and is therefore not subject to the laws of Tumah, as in the previous Mishnah (note 6).



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Mishnah Seven: Three Writers' Tablets

שלוש There are three types of [writers'] tablets. The apiforin¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one which has a receptacle for wax contracts corpse Tumah², the smooth one³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שלוש פְּנִיקְסִיּוֹת הֵן: הָאֶפִּיפּוֹרִין – טְמֵאָה מְדֻרָס; וְשֵׁשׁ בֵּה בֵּית קְבוּל שְׁעוּהָ – טְמֵאָה טְמֵאָה מֵת; וְחֻלְקָה – טְהוֹרָה מְבֵלוּם.

1. this was a type of chair made of two tablets connected with hinges, generally used when writing.
2. one would write on the wax with an awl; it was unusable for sitting.
3. a flat hand-held tablet—upon which one would write—without any elevated rim at its perimeter.
4. most types of Tumah are limited to utensils which have a cavity than can hold water (such as the tablet that has a receptacle for wax); since this writing tablet is flat and unable to hold water, it is Tahor.

Mishnah Eight: Three Beds

שלוש There are three types of beds. The one made for lying¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one of glaziers² contracts corpse Tumah, the one of wagon makers³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שלוש מִטּוֹת הֵן: הָעֲשׂוּיָה לְשֹׁכְבָה – טְמֵאָה מְדֻרָס; שֶׁל זִגְגִין – טְמֵאָה טְמֵאָה מֵת; וְשֶׁל סָרְגִין – טְהוֹרָה מְבֵלוּם.

1. i.e., a regular bed.
2. this had a large receptacle where glaziers would put their glass.
3. a large cubical platform of wood upon which wagons were assembled.
4. this was a flat utensil unable to hold water and thus Tahor.



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Mishnah Nine: Three Receptacles

שלוש There are three types of receptacles. The one for dung¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one for straw² contracts corpse Tumah, the receptacle for camels³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שלוש משפלות הן: של זבל – טמאה מדרס; של תבן – טמאה טמא מת; והפחלץ של גמלים – טהור מכלום.

1. it opened on the side; the person collecting the dung would sit on its top.
2. it opened on top; sitting there would interfere with its function.
3. a large receptacle made of stiff, widely-spaced ropes placed on camels, into which loads were put for the camel to transport.
4. the gaps between the ropes were larger than the size of a pomegranate; thus, it was not subject to the laws of Tumah.

Mishnah Ten: Three Mats

שלושה There are three types of mats. The one made for sitting contracts Stepping Tumah, the one of dyers¹ contracts corpse Tumah, the one of wine presses² is completely Tahor³.

שלושה מפצים הן: העשוי לישבה – טמא מדרס; של צבעין – טמא טמא מת; ושל גתות – טהור מכלום.

1. used to wrap dyed garments; not used for sitting.
2. used to cover grapes.
3. it serves the grapes and not the person; it is thus Tahor.



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Mishnah Eleven: Three Canteens, Three Rucksacks

שלוש There are three types of canteens and three types of rucksacks. Those which hold the measure¹ contract Stepping Tumah, those which are too small to hold the measure² contract corpse Tumah, those made of fish skins are completely Tahor³.

שלוש חמתות ושלשה תרמלין
הן: המקבליים בשעור –
טמאין מדרס; ושאיןן מקבלין
בשעור – טמאים טמא מת; ושל
עור הדג – טהור מכלום.

1. i.e. the measure specified in chapter 20 Mishnah 1—a canteen which holds seven Kav and a rucksack which holds five Kav; when they are these sizes they can be used for sitting.
2. too small for sitting. 3. Tumah applies only to the skins of land animals; fish skins are totally exempted from the laws of Tumah.

Mishnah Twelve: Three Animal Hides

שלושה There are three types of animal hides. The one made for spreading¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, [the one made] for wrapping utensils² contracts corpse Tumah, the one of straps and sandals³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שלושה עורות הן: העשוי
לשטיח – טמא
מדרס; לתכריך הכלים – טמא
טמא מת; ושל רצועות ושל
סנדלים – טהור מכלום.

1. i.e., spread on the ground and sat upon. 2. such as knives and scissors; unusable for sitting. 3. i.e. a large sheet of leather from which straps and sandal pieces would be cut out. 4. Tumah does not apply to utensils in an unfinished state.



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Mishnah Thirteen: Three Sheets

שַׁלְתָּה There are three types of sheets. The one made for lying¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, [the one made] for drapery² contracts corpse Tumah, the one of pictures³ is completely Tahor⁴.

שַׁלְתָּה סְדִינִין הֵן: הָעֲשׂוּי לְשִׁבְיָה – טָמֵא מְדָרְס; לְוִילוֹן – טָמֵא טָמֵא מֵת; וְשֵׁל צוּרוֹת – טָהוֹר מִכָּלִים.

1. i.e., a bedsheet. 2. i.e. a hanging curtain; not used for sitting. 3. a piece of artwork on canvass or some other cloth sheet, usually hung on the wall. 4. this has no active function and is thus exempted from the laws of Tumah.

Mishnah Fourteen: Three Cloths

שַׁלְשָׁה There are three types of cloths. The one of the hands¹ contracts Stepping Tumah², the one [used to cover] books^{3*},⁴ contracts corpse Tumah, the one of shrouds and the one [used to wrap] the Levites' violins are completely Tahor⁵.

שַׁלְשָׁה מְטַפְחוֹת הֵן: שֵׁל יָדַיִם – טָמֵא מְדָרְס; שֵׁל סְפָרִין – טָמֵא טָמֵא מֵת; וְשֵׁל תְּכָרִיד, וְשֵׁל נְבִלֵי בְּנֵי לֵוִי – טָהוֹר מִכָּלִים.

1. i.e., a hand towel. 2. this was sometimes used as a pillow cover and slept on. 3*. [for scrolls.] 4. not used for sitting. 5. the laws of Tumah apply only to utensils which may be utilized for typical, unconsecrated, human need. The cloths being considered here could not be used for mundane purposes: shrouds are designated for the deceased—anything designated for the deceased may not be put to other use; and the cloths for Levites' violins were consecrated to the temple services and likewise proscribed for other use



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Mishnah Fifteen: Three Gloves

שלושה *There are three types of gloves. The one of animal and bird hunters¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one for grasshoppers² contracts corpse Tumah, the one for thorns³ is completely Tahor⁴.*

שלושה פְּרָקְלִינִין הֵן: שֶׁל צְדֵי חַיָּה וְעוֹף – טְמֵא מִדָּרָס; שֶׁל חֲגָבִין – טְמֵא מִתּוֹ; וְשֶׁל קִיָּצִין – טָהוֹר מִכָּלֵם.

1. this was a large glove also used for sitting. 2. i.e. hunting grasshoppers; it was too small for sitting. 3. worn while pulling thorns. 4. this has no positive function; it served only to avoid a negative—being pricked by the thorns, and is thus Tahor.

Mishnah Sixteen: Three Netted Bonnets

שלוש *There are three types of netted bonnets. The one of girls¹ contracts Stepping Tumah, the one of women² contracts corpse Tumah, the one of those going outside³ is completely Tahor⁴.*

שלוש סְבֻכּוֹת הֵן: שֶׁל יְלָדָה – טְמֵאָה מִדָּרָס; שֶׁל זְקֵנָה – טְמֵאָה מִתּוֹ; וְשֶׁל יוֹצֵאת לַחוּץ – טָהוֹרָה מִכָּלֵם.

1. this could be used for sitting. 2. this could not be used for sitting. 3. i.e. a type of rain bonnet 4. it does not have the normal positive function of clothing—to endow one with a respectful appearance—but a negative one, of not becoming wet from rain.



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Mishnah Seventeen: Three Baskets

שלוש There are three types of baskets¹. A withered one fastened onto a sturdy one²—we follow the sturdy one³, a small one fastened onto a large one⁴— [and both are equally sturdy] —we follow the large one⁵, if both are equal⁶—we follow the one on the inside⁷. Rabbi Shimon says, “The pan of a balance-scale⁸ that was fastened onto the bottom of a kettle⁹ from the inside is Tamei¹⁰, [if it was fastened] from the outside it is Tahor¹¹. If it was fastened on the side—whether from the inside or the outside—it is Tahor¹².”

שלוש קפות הן: מהוהה שטליה על הבריה – הולבין אחר הבריה; קטנה על הגדולה – הולבין אחר הגדולה; היו שוות – הולבין אחר הפנימית. רבי שמעון אומר: כף מאזנים שטליה על שולי המחס: מבפנים – טמא, מבחוץ – טהור. טליה על צדו: בין מבפנים בין מבחוץ – טהור.

1. i.e., three situations of a pair of baskets, one subject to the laws of Tumah and the other exempted, and one is embedded into the other; the question being which of the baskets is dominant within the ‘combination basket’ so as to determine whether or not the laws of Tumah will now apply. 2. a withered one was set into a sturdy one or a sturdy one was set into a withered one. 3. i.e., the Tumah status of the combination basket is determined by that of the sturdy basket. 4. i.e. a tall one was set into a short one or a short one was set into a tall one. 5. i.e., the Tumah status of the combination basket is determined by that of the larger (taller) basket. 6. in both sturdiness and size. 7. i.e., the Tumah status of the combination basket is determined by that of the inner basket. (This is because the item or items contained in the combination basket are in actual physical contact with the inner basket, making it the primary ‘container’.) Thus, the primary factor for determining Tumah status is sturdiness, when both baskets are equal in this regard the status is determined by the secondary factor—size, when the baskets match each other also in this regard, we fall onto the third factor, that of being on the inside. 8. which is subject to the laws of Tumah. 9. which is exempted from the laws of Tumah. 10. i.e., the status of the pan dominates because it is on the inside. 11. i.e., the status of the kettle dominates because it is on the inside. 12. i.e., in the previous case where the scale-pan was attached to the ‘bottom’ of the kettle—the main part of the kettle as far as containing water—if the scale-pan is inside, it is seen as the dominant part of the combination utensil, which is thus subject to the laws of Tumah. Here, however, where the scale-pan is on the side, and the bottom—the main part—of the kettle is unaffected by the scale-pan, the kettle retains its previous status and is Tahor.



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Of note is the Ra'av's summation of this chapter, at the end of his commentary to this Mishnah, that:

The reason of all Stepping Tumah, corpse Tumah, and being completely Tahor mentioned here is that anything fit for lying, that is, lying, sitting, or leaning on, contracts Stepping Tumah, except for earthenware utensils.... Utensils made of stone, feces, or unbaked earth are Tahor and so too anything which comes from the sea [such as fish skins]. Wooden utensils of measure—that measure 40 or more liquid Sa'ah, equivalent to two Koor [60 Sa'ah] of dry measure, are also completely Tahor—because they cannot be transported when full. So too anything not considered a utensil for Torah law, or [even] if Torah law considers it a utensil, but it does not serve the person, rather, it serves that which serves him, such as the olive tarbus... [and the closet base], which are not considered as utensils which serve the person [himself], are completely Tahor.