

Parsha Ponders

Shemini | Apr 4, 2024 | 26 Adar II 5784

Nullification priorities¹

אל-תשקצו את-נפשתיכם בכל-השרץ השרץ ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמתם בם

Do not abominate your souls with all sorts of the creepy crawlies, and do not contaminate **with them**, nor become contaminated **in them**²

Our Sages teach us³ that if we contaminate ourselves with forbidden foods [בהם], our end is to be contaminated in them [בם]. This seems a little redundant. As well, what's the significance of the pronoun change from בהם to בם?⁴

One approach is based on an explanation of the Ramban. The *gemarra* teaches us⁵ that if a barrel of forbidden wine slowly pours into a vat of permitted wine, every drop of forbidden wine is nullified, and the wine remains permitted. However, if a permitted liquid pours slowly into a large amount of a forbidden liquid, the permitted liquid isn't nullified⁶. The consequence of this latter case would be that if a large enough amount of the permitted liquid would be poured in, the entire contents would become permitted. What's the difference between the first case and the second case?

The Ramban explains⁷ that the concept of nullification in *halacha* is based on a person's intent. Normally, a Jew would not want forbidden foods to be mixed in with what their eating. The forbidden food is not considered significant. As such, if it gradually falls in, it is nullified, and is considered as if it's not there. This is not so with permitted foods. As they gradually fall into forbidden foods, the Jew wants the permitted foods to retain their identity. He's optimistic and hopes for the best that there will eventually be enough permitted foods to override the forbidden foods. As such, they are not nullified.

If so, one could extrapolate to someone who brazenly and wantonly eats forbidden foods. For such a person, perhaps the concept of nullification wouldn't apply. Since the forbidden foods are considered important in their eyes, they take on the same status as permitted foods. Just like permitted liquids that fall into forbidden liquids are not nullified, so too forbidden liquids that fall into permitted liquids.

According to this, we have a new understanding of the *Midrash*. If a person contaminates themselves with forbidden foods [בהם], as in, eats them on their own, they have set their fate. They have now determined that if forbidden foods would fall into their permitted foods, they don't get the normal rules of nullification. They'll end up contaminating themselves even in mixtures of them [בם]. Their sin would only lead to further sin. We see then just how serious we should take the prohibition of forbidden foods. Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Da'as Torah Sha'arei Shalom § 22 (printed at the beginning of the volume on *Yoreh Deah*) by the Maharsham

² Leviticus 11:43

³ Midrash HaGadol ad. loc.; Yalkut Shimoni Shemini § 546. The Maharsham brings this *Midrash* based on Leviticus 20:25, writing that this is a Yalkut Shimoni at the end of *parshas Kedoshim*. However, we have it on our verse in this week's *parsha*. In truth, the Maharsham is merely quoting the Yeshuos Ya'akov to Leviticus 20:25. He's the one who brings this *Midrash* and quotes that verse. For whatever reason he was applying this *Midrash* there, and the Maharsham probably assumed that the Yalkut was therefore in *Kedoshim* and not *Shemini*

⁴ See the Yeshuos Ya'akov loc. cit. for a different approach (which the Maharsham happens to not like)

⁵ Avodah Zarah 73a

⁶ The Ramban ad. loc. created this case. The *Mishnah* there says even the smallest amount of forbidden wine makes a mixture forbidden, and the *gemarra* says this is referring to permitted wine slowly pouring into forbidden wine. It would sound like the permitted wine is nullified, just like in the *gemarra's* first case of forbidden wine pouring into permitted wine. However, the Ramban explains that this is not what is going on. In reality, permitted liquids slowly pouring into forbidden liquids aren't nullified. This allows them to become the majority and permit the mixture. The problem with the forbidden wine is a special case, as it forbids even in miniscule amounts

⁷ Ibid