



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בראשית תש"ע 5770

THE CREATION OF SEAWEED

In this week's *parshah*, the intricacies of the topic of *tumah* and *taharah* (ritual impurity and purity) are woven together with the Creation narrative to form a most delightful and intriguing tapestry.

For background purposes, we present here a brief synopsis of the Creation schedule, in which the items created on any given day of the Six Days of Creation are mentioned:

Day #1: Heaven and earth (and light).

Day #2: Firmament separating between the upper waters and the lower waters (the latter being the *yam* [sea]).

Day #3: Trees, grass, and all vegetation.

Day #4: Heavenly bodies of illumination (sun, moon, stars).

Day #5: Flying creatures and denizens of the sea.

Day #6: Animals and man.

The Mishnah in Keilim (17:14) goes through each day of Creation, noting on which days materials susceptible to defilement were created:

וַיֵּשׁ בְּמָה שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְיוֹם הָרֵאשׁוֹן טְמָאָה, בְּשָׁנֵי אֵין בּוֹ טְמָאָה, בְּשָׁלִישֵׁי יוֹם בּוֹ טְמָאָה, בְּרִבְעֵי וּבְחֲמִישֵׁי אֵין בָּהֶם טְמָאָה... שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְיוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי, טְמָאָה.

"From things created on day one, there are those that are susceptible to *tumah*. Nothing created on day two is susceptible to *tumah*. There are items created on day three with *tumah*-susceptibility. Days four and five contain no *tumah*-susceptible items... but creations of day six are *tumah*-susceptible."

In all, days one, three and six contain *tumah*-susceptible items, while days two, four and five do not. The Bartenura fills in the details: Generally speaking, materials become *tumah*-susceptible when they are fashioned into vessels or clothing – that is, depending on what the materials are. On the first day, the earth was created earthenware vessels are susceptible to *tumah*. Day number two saw the fashioning of the firmament separating the waters nothing there that could incur *tumah*. The third day saw the creation of the trees wooden vessels are susceptible to *tumah*. On the fourth and fifth days, the heavenly bodies and creatures of the air and sea were formed, respectively. They do not incur *tumah*, and so, seemingly, a moon-rock jug, or a sharkskin purse would be *tumah*-free. However, leather-products from animals – created on the sixth day – would be susceptible to *tumah*.

THE PROBLEM WITH SEAWEED

Upon delving into some of the intricacies of this topic, a point to consider would be the various forms of sea vegetation (generally referred to as kelp or seaweed). Although possibly not the most fashionable by current standards, people did utilize (at one point or another) the abundant fibrous material supplied by the ocean floor as yarn for the manufacture of garments. Into what category would these products fall – would they be susceptible to *tumah* or not?

Based on the background information reviewed above, it would seem that they *would* be able to contract *tumah*. Vegetation in general sprouted forth on the third day, as the *passuk* says (*Bereishis* 1:11,13), "And Hashem said, 'Let the earth be covered with grasses... and it was... the third day.'" As stated in the Mishnah above, things created on

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the third day are susceptible to *tumah*, and so it would seem that seaweed-clothes would be able to incur *tumah*.

All is well until we turn to the Rambam to see how he decides in this matter. In Hilchos Keilim (1:3) he writes: “A garment woven from the fibrous material that grows in the sea *does not* incur *tumah*.”

What emerges from the Rambam’s words is not just a *halachic* rendering but a new understanding of an aspect of Creation. R’ Ya’akov Kamenetsky (*Emes L’Ya’akov, Bereishis 2:1*) explains: Contrary to our initial assumption, it must be that seaweed

was not created with the rest of the herbaceous kingdom. When Hashem declared on the third day, “Let the earth be covered with grasses, herbs... trees,” etc., the grass grew in the fields, trees sprang up in the forest, but seaweed did not arise from the ocean floor. The creation of seaweed did not occur until the *fifth* day, in connection with the creation of the other inhabitants of the sea.

Apparently, seaweed – despite the fact that it grows from the ground in the manner of other vegetation – is nevertheless considered a sea-creation, not a product of the earth. As such, it would fall under the rubric of the ruling of another Mishnah in Keilim, which states simply that כֹּל שֶׁבָּיָם טָהוֹר, whatever comes from the sea is (automatically) pure (*tumah-free*).

Support for this notion comes from the “*Vayevareich David*” section of the daily prayers. The verse states:

אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם וְכָל צְבָאָם
הָאָרֶץ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיָּמִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם :

“You (Hashem) have made the heavens, and the heavens of the heavens the earth, *and all that is upon it* the oceans, *and all contained therein*,” (*Nechemiah 9:6*).

Here, explains R’ Ya’akov, the *passuk* establishes a clear distinction between that which is *on the earth*, and that which is *in the oceans*. Apparently, whatever is in the oceans is automatically excluded from the previous category of *all that is upon the earth*. And so, when the earth was instructed to bring forth its vegetation, the ocean floor was not included. Ocean products – fish, seaweed, and the like – were summoned into existence at a different time.

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