

Clean and Unclean Laws Part 2 (Kosher Law)

Introduction

Whilst the issue of clean and unclean encompasses a variety of situations we are only interested in how these laws affect the dietary laws. The salient issue for us is the transference of uncleanness to a human from either an unclean item or animal. There are several passages in the Scriptures that relate to the uncleanness of a person. Some of these are associated with animal offerings and are no longer applicable, Lev.5:2, 7:20 for example. However, the principle behind these clauses may still apply today so we must be guarded when advocating the exclusion of any Scripture. Another aspect we must be aware of, is that some uncleanness is a crime requiring atonement, whilst other forms of uncleanness last only until evening and are overcome by bathing. So there is an element of complexity we need to deal with.

Origins of Uncleanness

1) Human Uncleanness Through Contact

Human uncleanness is in most cases transmitted by touch but not in every case. This extends to touching anything that was originally clean but through some event became unclean. However, there is a critical point to be made with respect to this issue, let us call it contamination, We should understand all animals are clean. We do not become unclean by touching those animals YHWH has declared unclean for eating whilst they are alive. However, it is not so when an animal declared unclean for eating has died because its carcass is always unclean (refer Lev.5:2 below). Obviously we can touch the carcass of kosher animals provided the kosher animal has been slaughtered properly and not died by other means, in which case it would be unclean. Consider the following Scriptures,

- 1 *Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether it is the carcass of an unclean beast, or a carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean, and guilty. (Lev.5:2).*
 - 2 *Or if he touches human uncleanness – whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it – when he realises it, then he shall be guilty. (Lev.5:3).*
 - 3 *‘And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing and he shall bring his sin offering to YHWH for the sin he has committed. (Lev.5:5).*
 - 4 *.... so the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin. (Lev.5:6).*
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- 5 *‘And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass is unclean until evening, and he who picks up their carcass has to wash his garments, and shall be unclean until evening. They are unclean to you. (Lev.11:27-28)*
 - 6 *‘And these are unclean to you among the creeping creatures that creep on the earth: the mole, and the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind, the gecko, the monitor lizard etc. ‘These are unclean to you among all that creep. whoever touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening. (Lev.11:29-31)*
 - 7 *‘And when any of the beasts which are yours for food dies, (not slaughtered) he who touches its carcass becomes unclean until evening. (Lev.11:39)*

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When we look at section 1 above the result of the uncleanness is sin requiring atonement, whereas the uncleanness spoken of in section 2 is of a temporary nature lasting only until evening. Yet items 1 and 6 are almost identical so why is the result different? The fundamental difference between sections 1 and 2 is awareness. I can only suggest that when a person is unaware of his uncleanness he continues as if in a clean state and may therefore unwittingly have committed further transgressions of Torah and so atonement will correct his situation.

2) Clean Foods becoming Unclean Through Contamination

The following are the pertinent verses in the Scriptures,

These are unclean to you among all that creep. Anyone who touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening. (Lev.11:31)

And whatever any of them in its dead state falls upon, becomes unclean, whether it is any wooden object or garment or skin or sack, any object in which work is done, it is put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening, then it shall be clean. Any earthen vessel into which any of them falls, whatever is in it becomes unclean, and you break it. (Lev.11:32-33).

These two verses in particular present a problem. Anything touched by the carcass of an unclean thing itself becomes unclean. It seems logical for this rule to extend to cooking utensils and even the medium used for cooking i.e. a cooking vessel and the oil used for example cooking pig, shellfish etc. is contaminated until evening if washed. After washing the vessel the contaminated oil would have to be replaced with fresh clean oil. No more visits to the 'chippy' where all is usually fried in the same oil.

'Any of the food which might be eaten, on which water comes, becomes unclean, and any drink which might be drunk from it becomes unclean. (Lev.11:34).

I believe this verse is referring to water poured from an unclean vessel.

'And on whatever any of their carcass falls becomes unclean – an oven or cooking range – it is broken down. They are unclean, and are unclean to you. (Lev.1:35).

In my opinion this verses would have been applicable to earthen cooking ranges which fall under earthen vessels and have to be destroyed when contaminated (Lev.11:33). I consider the reason for this is because such items are porous and the contamination would be absorbed into the body of the item - my thoughts only.

Conclusion

We can reasonably conclude that insofar as the dietary laws are concerned,

- When we become unclean through contact we remain unclean only until evening.
- We must atone for ourselves if we have unwittingly become unclean. Remember today atonement is through prayer (Heb.13:15).
- When the carcass of something unclean comes into contact with that which is clean, the clean becomes unclean: whether the clean is an item of food, a cooking utensil a cooking medium such as oil or a vessel of any kind.

This whole article: Parts 1 and 2, is presented to stimulate discussion and I would be interested in receiving comments. Ultimately it is for readers to investigate the Scriptures for themselves and make their own conclusions.