

## If an animal that you may eat has died, one who touches its carcass shall become contaminated. (11:39)

We can derive some thoughtful lessons from the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, ritual purity. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, contends that the various cases of ritual contamination are derived from the principal source of *tumah*, the *avi avos ha'tumah*, "father of the fathers of contamination," the human corpse. Death is the ultimate expression of the separation of the soul and spirit from the matter which we call the human body. Hence, the corpse represents the physical dimension in its totality, in its most absolute form, severed from the moral freedom that life offers us. The freedom to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil, is the basis of our relationship with the Almighty. It gives the ability to rise above the mundane to serve Hashem. The closer a creature is to the human condition, such as mammals, or the more an object or garment brings to mind his presence, the greater the susceptibility to contamination.

*Horav Hirsch* suggests that clothing, vessels, and tools implement the most direct indication of man's activity and presence. Thus, the laws of *tumah*, contamination, regarding these objects are identical with those which apply to man. This is consistent with the *halachic* axiom of "*cherev, harei hu k'chalal*," a sword is like, (contracts *tumah*) the actual corpse. By avoiding *tumaas- keilm*, contamination of our vessels and the objects of our social and individual activity, we elevate and consecrate them to our holy ideal.

Another important lesson to be noted from the laws of *tumah* may be derived from the fact that contamination spreads to any article through the vehicle of simple contact. This is in stark contrast to holiness which is transmitted through actual absorption of the holy object. *Horav Eli Munk, zl*, draws a parallel to good and evil. While evil is spread easily, travelling like an unleashed disease, holiness and good require real penetration in order to be transmitted to others. While it is true that exposure to good is in itself a wonderful opportunity for inspiration, if it is to endure, one must assimilate this virtue into his psyche.