

Do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them. (11:43)

Noticeably, the *aleph* of *v'nitamtem* /*v'nitmeisem* is missing. We translate *v'nitmeisem* as, “and you have become contaminated through them.” In contrast, we read *v'nitamtem* as “and you become dulled by them.” Consuming forbidden foods will cause the mind to become dense (with regard to learning Torah, which he will have difficulty grasping) and ultimately blunt his spirituality. The following story is frightening and gives us all something to ponder. A devout family was blessed that all of their sons were accomplished *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, except for their youngest child, who could not comprehend the simplest, most basic line of Torah. Regardless of the material and the proficiency of the *rebbe*, it did not enter his head. He could grasp nothing. With regard to secular studies, he was absolutely brilliant, nothing was difficult, as he was able to master the most difficult subjects with minimal effort. The parents had spoken to a number of Torah giants and received blessings, but nothing seemed to be effective.

One day, *Horav Akiva Eiger, zl*, visited their community. The mother of this boy made an appointment to speak with him concerning her son. The *gaon* listened and replied, “The great *halachic* arbiters (*Shach Yoreh Deah* 81) write that extreme care must be tendered in order that a child not consume any forbidden food. Failure to do this will result in limiting the child's ability to understand and retain Torah. “*Rebbe*, what can we do now to help him?” the mother asked. “He should study amid deprivation. This will cleanse him of the contamination that he absorbed” was his response.

The parents struggled to discern when their son could have possibly come in contact with non-kosher/spiritually defective food. They reviewed every possible activity in which their son could have accidentally stumbled and eaten prohibited food. After scrutinizing every juncture and circumstance during which he might have eaten something questionable, they remembered! When the boy was five years old, he had walked home from *cheder*. It was *Chanukah*, and *cheder* was over early. The boy passed a wedding hall where a wedding was in full session. One of the *mehutanim*, in laws, gave the boy a piece of chicken to eat on his way home.

The father heard this and wondered. The caterer was a devout Jew. The *shochet*, ritual slaughterer, was a *Chabad chassid* who was equally devout. He visited the caterer and asked him straight, “Did anything unusual occur during a wedding ten years ago on *Chanukah*?” He looked in his calendar and read that a certain Jew had remarried on the second night of *Chanukah*. The father returned to the *shochet* and asked if possibly something had gone wrong that night. The *shochet* thought for a few moments, then his face turned ashen, “Yes, yes, at that wedding I had made a mistake in the slaughtering of a number of chickens.” The father of the boy was shaking when he asked, “You allowed the guests to eat chicken that was not kosher?” “No, no,” replied the *shochet*, “the chicken was kosher *l'mehadrin*, for the most meticulous standards. There was, however, another problem. Thirty years ago, the *chassan*, groom, at that wedding had divorced his

first wife. Rumors went out that the *get*, divorce, was not up to par. A number of distinguished *Rabbanim* ruled that the *get* was invalid. Over time, people forgot about it, and this man, who had no respect for the ruling of the *Rabbanim*, went about his merry way. Ten years ago, he remarried in the hall in question. I was the *shochet*. A number of days after the wedding, one of my friends, also a *Chabad chassid*, rebuked me, "How could you have allowed the few ruble that you earned for slaughtering the chicken to blind you to the fact that our revered *Rebbe*, the *Baal HaTanya*, was one of the primary signatories invalidating that *get*! The *Rebbe* declared that anyone who slaughtered for the second wedding of that scoundrel – the *shechitah* is *treifah*!"

The father and *shochet* broke down in bitter weeping. The father had finally discovered where his son had obtained non-kosher chicken, – or rather, chicken that had been rendered unkosher by the holy *Baal HaTanya*.