

## An elephant that swallowed a wicker basket – פיל שבלע כפיפה מצרית

### OVERVIEW

A query was posed regarding a wicker basket which an elephant swallowed and excreted it together with his waste. The question is whether the basket is now considered as כלי גללים (utensils made out of dung), which are not מקבל טומאה, or not (and they are מקבל טומאה)<sup>1</sup>. תוספות offers an alternate interpretation of this query.

בפרק רבי ישמעאל (מנחות דף סט,א ושם דיבור המתחיל פיל) איתא להך בעיא דהכא -

This query here is (also) cited in פרק ר' ישמעאל -

ומסיק התם למאי אי למבטל טומאתו תנינא<sup>2</sup> -

And the גמרא there concludes, 'regarding which issue is this query, if it is regarding nullifying its present טמאה; this cannot be, for we learnt this in a משנה -

כל הכלים יורדין לידי טומאה במחשבה<sup>3</sup> ואין עולין מטומאה<sup>4</sup> אלא בשינוי מעשה<sup>5</sup> -

'All utensils descend to become טמא, with thought alone; however they do not ascend from their טומאה to become טהור, unless there is a change of action' -

וקאמר לא צריכא דבלע הוצין ועבדינהו כפיפה אי הוי עיכול והוי ככלי גללים או לא -

So the גמרא concluded that this query was necessary only in a case where it swallowed palm fronds and excreted them and the fronds were used to make a basket; the query is whether these הוצין are considered digested by the elephant and the basket should be considered like dung vessels (and are not מקבל טומאה), or they are not considered digested and the baskets made from them are מקבל טומאה. This concludes the citation from the גמרא in מנחות -

והכא בלע הוצין בעא מיניה דאי כפיפה שלימה אמאי לא הוה בידיה מתניתין היא<sup>6</sup> -

So therefore here they asked רב דימי מנהרדעא regarding a case where the elephant swallowed הוצין (as the גמרא concluded in מנחות), for if the query was regarding a whole basket, why did רב דימי not know the answer, since it is an explicit משנה?!

<sup>1</sup> See רש"י ד"ה מהו who writes, מי חשוב כמעוכל והוה ליה ככלי גללים ואין מקבל טומאה עוד. It is not clear if רש"י (only) means that they will not be מקבל טומאה in the future, or he means that if they were טמא before, they are טהור now.

<sup>2</sup> כלים פכ"ה מ"ט.

<sup>3</sup> A כלי cannot be מקבל טומאה unless it is a complete כלי. The decision whether the כלי is complete or not depends on the one making the כלי. If at any point he decides that it is a finished product and no additional work needs to be done, this מחשבה is sufficient for it to be considered a כלי גמר and it can be מקבל טומאה.

<sup>4</sup> If a כלי became טמא (after the owner decided that it was completed), and now he decides that more work needs to be done, that is not sufficient to remove the טומאה. In order to remove the טומאה, the כלי must cease to exist as a proper כלי; it needs to be broken [for instance].

<sup>5</sup> However in this (proposed) query there was no שינוי מעשה for it was swallowed whole and excreted whole, therefore it cannot become טהור.

<sup>6</sup> It is an assumption that the אמוראים were well versed in all the משניות. See 'Thinking it over # 1.

תוספות asks:

וקשיא לרבינו תם אם כן אמאי לא נקיטו ליה שוקא<sup>7</sup> הא בעיא זו לא איפשיטא התם -  
**And the ר"ת has a difficulty with this interpretation; if indeed it is so (that the query was regarding הוצין (בלע הוצין), why did they not hold up the market for him, since this query was not resolved there?!**

תוספות answers:

ויש לומר דמכל מקום הוה ליה לאיתויי הנך ראיות דמייתי התם<sup>8</sup> ודחי להו:  
**And one can say that (regardless that there is no resolution), nevertheless he should have cited those various proofs that were offered there to resolve this query and were rejected.**

### **SUMMARY**

The query is not regarding swallowing a whole basket (for we know from a משנה that it will remain טמא), rather the query was where palm fronds were swallowed and a basket was made from them; is it considered כלי גללים or not. Even when one may not know the final answer, he should mention the various sources that may answer the question and why ultimately they don't.

### **THINKING IT OVER**

1. Why cannot we resolve the story in this manner; רב דימי assumed that they were asking about הוצין (and therefore he did not answer), however in truth they were asking about a whole basket (and therefore שוקא ליה שוקא)?!<sup>9</sup>
2. It seems that רב דימי was wrong in that he did not discuss the issue.<sup>10</sup> However from the גמרא later it seems that רב דימי was wronged, for he claimed אנא ענישתיא that רב דימי died because he (seemingly) wronged רב דימי. So which way is it?!<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> If a תלמיד has wares to sell we announce that no one can sell this item until the ת"ח has sold out his wares. In our case why did they not prevent them from selling before רב דימי, since this question was not resolved; how can he have answered this query. If we were to learn that the query was regarding a complete מצרית, we understand why לא נקיט ליה שוקא, since he should have known the ruling from the משנה, but in this case there is no ruling.

<sup>8</sup> רב דימי could have told them that we cannot resolve this query from this source or another source, the way the גמרא attempted to resolve the query and he should have explained why it cannot be resolved from those sources. Instead רב דימי remained silent, which indicated to them that he was not that well versed in the issue, therefore לא נקטו ליה שוקא. See 'Thinking it over' # 2.

<sup>9</sup> See הישועות.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote # 8.

<sup>11</sup> See תורת חיים.