

Analysis of “the Hand-Washing סוגיא”

The סוגיא selection I have made is that of, what for present purposes, I will call “the hand-washing סוגיא” (HWS), which can be found on *Shabbat* 108b-109a. I have outlined its parameters as being that as beginning towards the end of the page in the Vilna Romm edition on 108b starting with the words *אלא הכי אמר שמואל* and concluding with the words *שיער בעפעפים* before *מר עוקבא* on 109a. The reasoning behind establishing these parameters is that I am mainly interested in investigating the statements of Rabbi Muna on 108b-109a and Rabbi Natan on 109a as per hand-washing, and the issue of *רוח רעה* (and eventually how it got to be in the *שלחן ערוך*, *אורה חיים* ד:ב, and so forth), which is really brought up with the *ברייתא* where Rabbi Muna quoted Rabbi Yehudah, which is a very similar statement to that directly preceding it by Shmuel. As per the end parameter of this סוגיא, a second (of three) statements that *מר עוקבא* said that *שמואל* said is recorded (after the third, a statement of *מר עוקבא* by himself is recorded, introducing yet another idea) which introduces a new topic.

To ease referencing throughout the duration of this paper, I will refer to the various sections and mark them out. The first part I will refer to as Shmuel’s opening statement (SOS), which comprises the text

אלא הכי אמר שמואל טובה טיפת צונן שחרית ורחיצת ידים ורגלים בחמין ערבית מכל קילורין שבעולם
Actually, Shmuel said, “Better is a drop of water in the morning and washing of hands and feet in hot water in the evening than all of the eye-salves in the world.

The next two parts are parts of a beraita, to which I shall refer as TNHB1 and TNHB2 (Tanya Nami Hakhi Beraita):

תניא נמי הכי: אמר רבי מונא משום רבי יהודה: טובה טיפת צונן שחרית, ורחיצת ידים ורגלים ערבית, מכל קילורין שבעולם.

It was also taught thus: Rabbi Muna said on Rabbi Yehuda's account: "Better is a drop of cold in the morning and washing of hands and feet in the evening than all of the eye-salves in the world."

הוא היה אומר: יד לעין תיקצץ, יד לחוטם תיקצץ, יד לפה תיקצץ, יד לאוזן תיקצץ, יד לחסודה תיקצץ, יד לאמה תיקצץ, יד לפי טבעת תיקצץ, יד לגיגית תיקצץ. יד מסמא, יד מחרשת, יד מעלה פוליפוס.

He used to say, "A hand to the eye should be cut off, a hand to the nose (nostril) should be cut off, a hand to the mouth should be cut off, a hand to the ear should be cut off, a hand to the vein opened for blood-letting should be cut off, a hand to the penis should be cut off, a hand to the anus should be cut off, a hand to the beer tank should be cut off. A hand blinds, a hand deafens, a hand brings up a polyp.

The next part, which I will call the free person beraita (FPB), is the fourth section:

תניא: רבי נתן אומר בת חורין היא זו ומקפדת עד שירחוץ ידיו שלש פעמים.

It was taught: Rabbi Natan said, "She is a free person and she is careful until he washes his hands three times."

The fifth section consists of a statement made by Rabbi Yoḥanan (RYS):

א"ר יוחנן פוך מעביר בת מלך ופוסק את הדמעה ומרבה שיער בעפעפים.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said, "Eye-dressing removes a king's daughter, stops tears, and increases the growth of eyelashes."

The last and sixth section, I will call TNHRY:

תניא נמי הכי: רבי יוסי אומר פוך מעביר בת מלך ופוסק את הדמעה ומרבה שיער בעפעפים.

It was also taught thus: Rabbi Yose says, "Eye-dressing removes a king's daughter, stops tears, and increases the growth of eyelashes."

Starting on the textual witnesses level, there is very little variance amongst the texts, so there is little to remark on this topic. Most of the textual witnesses on the Lieberman CD are similar to what can be found in the Romm printed edition. The most significant difference amongst them is that in the statement regarding בת חורין, MSS Oxford, Vatican 108, and Munich 95 all have Rabbi Yose speaking, whereas both the Soncino and Romm printed editions have Rabbi Natan speaking. While the content is not different, the significance is regarding intellectual history. A similar, though less significant difference is that MS Munich records Rabbi Matyah and not Rabbi Muna in TNHB1. Another MS Munich difference is that in

TNHRY, the תניא נמי הכי is omitted. Rabbi Rabbinowicz, in his סופרים דקדוקי offers five different textual possibilities. While I have already mentioned two of them and two more are not significant, one of them is the language of יד לאמה תיקצץ in TNHB2.

As to figuring out the סוגיא, I will now try to provide a running commentary (much like the function of Rashi, however Rashi drives this סוגיא in a direction that I do not see as according with the פשט of the text(s) (I will get to this later in the paper.)). Shmuel's statement is one regarding personal hygiene. While it is brought into the סוגיא in order to say something about eye-salves and ocular hygiene for the morning, it also contains a component of hands- and feet-washing in the evening. Presumably when people would come back from a day of working, dust and dirt would come up on their feet and most certainly get on their hands and they would need to wash them off.

This is then followed up immediately afterward with a תניא נמי הכי *beraita* with Rabbi Muna quoting Rabbi Yehudah with an almost identical first part as that to the statement of Shmuel, although without specifying that the water in the evening should be warm. The second part of the *beraita* is Rabbi Muna making a statement about one's hand touching various places, most of them on the body. With the juxtaposition of these two teachings, it should be inferred that Rabbi Muna is making a statement about the importance of not touching these places without having washed one's hands, as they are dirty. As they should be cleaned in the evening, it would seem that Rabbi Muna is speaking about touching these places in the evening – that one should not touch them without washing one's hands. A further extension could be made that during the day, while one is involved with one's endeavors, one's hands (as well as feet, but as hands are used more, it seems more apt to refer to hands) are included, as they are dirty, as well.

The very last part of Rabbi Muna's statement switches from proscribing places a hand should touch to a description about hazards of the hand. What jumps out about these three is that there are eight places on the list, one of which is not bodily, leaving four bodily places not matched up with a description (the mouth, the vein opened for blood-letting, the penis, and the anus). It is possible that Rabbi Muna saw these four places as being particularly susceptible to similar health hazards. Alternatively, it could be that he considered those three to be paradigmatic for health hazards and that one would understand for the other four body parts and even the non-body part (the contents of which would eventually come into contact with the body) that it would be very possible for negative health effects to take place.

A study of the word *תקציץ* is always found within proximity to the word *יד*, relating to it. It is also mainly used in tannaitic texts: mNiddah 2.1 uses it in reference to a male hand which checks the genitals a lot, tNiddah 2.8 uses it in a parallel fashion with Rabbi Tarfon saying that the hand should be cut off even before it makes it to below the belt, bNiddah 13b quotes that Rabbi Tarfon part regarding the hand going below the belt, similarly does yNiddah 2.1 (in both Kallah 1.19 and Kallah Rabbati 2.5, the piece from our *סוגיא* is quoted), and once by an amora, Rav Huna, in bSanhedrin 58b, quoting a verse as Scriptural proof for cutting off a hand. Interestingly enough, the Rif (on our *סוגיא*, in chapter 14 of Shabbat) conflates our section of text and the Niddah text together, as the usage of the term *יד תקציץ* is found only in these two places, representing a *dis legomenon* within the *בבלי*. From this, we can perhaps take *אמה* out of the category as being something that could be touched, bringing with it ill health, but rather something of a more serious, religious danger.

Moving on to the next section, the FPB, is the least clear of the statements found within our *סוגיא*. The question which strikes one is firstly who is this free woman? Secondly, why the

switch in gender? Thirdly, who would be the man to whom this statement is obliquely referring? My contention is that it is quite simple, considering what preceded it: a free, married woman is very careful to have her husband clean his hands thrice before he engages in any activities upon his return from his day's work, whether it be to touch his food, or anything else. Otherwise, the lack of cleanliness would be disgusting to her. One remaining question is why was this statement brought into the סוגיא? In addition to being the least clear of the statements, it is also seemingly the least connected with ocular hygiene and is only connected by the reference to the washing of hands. Did the arranger of this סוגיא have in mind that FPB was discussing washing in the evening just like SOS and TNHB1 or was it about some other washing?

However, this is where Rabbenu Hananel (and Rashi following him) takes a different route. Rabbenu Hananel said (on 109a, s.v. . אומר בת חורין היא. [נתן] (יוסי) תניא ר' (תניא ר' (יוסי) that what Rabbi Natan is speaking is concerning an “evil spirit that rests upon the eye, that there is a heaviness of spirits like a free man amongst men and it doesn't leave until the three times [of washing] or an eye-dressing removes it.” This understanding is somewhat cryptic concerning this harmful spirit or, perhaps, this medical phenomenon that requires to be removed. Rashi took this idea and ran with it, not only suggesting that this free woman was really a harmful spirit, but that it rests upon the hands (see Rashi ad 109a, s.v. בת חורין היא and even 108b, s.v. תיקצץ (the first one, which is the fourth from last on the page, as opposed to the last one on the page)). Rashi's further development of this entire סוגיא is that this evil spirit comes to rest upon the hands while one is asleep at night and that one must wash one's hands in order to remove this dangerous substance upon one's hands in the morning (this takes place mainly from 108b, s.v. יד לעין until 109a, s.v. מעביר בת מלך). Everything else aside, what's of particular interest is Rashi's חידוש that this is

taking place in the morning, as opposed to the context which may be either of in the evening or all the time.

Lastly, both RYS and TNHRY continue the discussion on ocular hygiene with a discussion not on eye-salves, but rather on eye-dressing. Both TNHRY and TNHB (specifically TNHB1, rather than TNHB2) come on the heels of statements of early amoraim and, except for one word different in TNHB1, are identical to their preceding statements.

Although this סוגיא has commonly conceived as espousing the necessity of washing one's hands upon rising in the morning, that would be true through the eyes of Rashi, but not having been true to the text, itself. The סוגיא is concerned foremost with ocular hygiene and secondarily with one's hands' activity.