**The Role of Hand and Feet Washing in the Temple in Tannaitic Literature**

# Introduction

In Exodus 30:19-21, there is a commandment regarding the making of the laver and the priests’ washing from it:

And let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and their feet from it. When they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, that they not die. Or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to the Lord, that they shall wash their hands and feet, that they not die.

וְרָחֲצוּ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת רַגְלֵיהֶם. בְּבֹאָם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִרְחֲצוּ מַיִם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ אוֹ בְגִשְׁתָּם אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשָׁרֵת לְהַקְטִיר אִשֶּׁה לַה’. וְרָחֲצוּ יְדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ*.*

The commandment here refers both to washing for the purpose of entering the tent of meeting and washing for the purpose of serving at the outer altar. What is the purpose of this action? It is clear that it is not part of the regular system of impurity and purity found in the Bible: the commandment includes every priest, even one already pure, and it refers only to the hands and feet, while the impure need to wash their entire body.[[1]](#footnote-1)

We have two fundamental possibilities before us: First, we might focus this obligation on the past, on what the priest experienced prior to approaching the sacred, and on his duty to cleanse himself from it. Second, we might also focus this obligation on the future, on the destination he is entering, where the sanctity of the place and the importance of the service require a kind of rite of passage from the profane to the sacred. During the days of ordination recounted in Exod. 29, Moses was commanded to perform a long series of actions to sanctify Aaron and his sons in order to initiate them into the service in the Tabernacle. These were not purification rituals focused on the past but sanctification rituals, similar to the obligation to sanctify the Tabernacle and its vessels: “And I will sanctify the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will sanctify to serve Me as priests.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It can be understood, then, that this is also the purpose of washing the hands and feet: to sanctify the priest before he approaches the sacred.

The washing of hands and feet is mentioned many times in Jewish literature from the Second Temple period as well as in Tannaitic literature. However, while several scholars have dealt with sources from the Second Temple period, the role of washing in Tannaitic literature has not received sufficient scholarly attention. This study primarily seeks to examine the meaning of this commandment as it was interpreted in Tannaitic literature. As background, I will briefly review the meaning of the commandment in the Bible and as it was interpreted in Jewish sources from the Second Temple period.

# Hand and Feet Washing in the Bible

As mentioned, the Torah commands the construction of the laver and the washing of the priests’ hands and feet with it (Exod. 30). The execution of this command appears in Exod. 40:30-33. From Exod. 30, it appears that only approaching the altar for service requires washing, while regarding the tent of meeting, it seems that any entry, even without service, requires washing. In contrast, Exod. 40 states that even the mere approach to the altar requires washing. Nevertheless, many commentators have taken the view that the main point is as stated in Exod. 30, which distinguishes between the tent of meeting and the altar, where only service at the latter requires washing.[[3]](#footnote-3)

What is the purpose of this washing? Washing the feet of those coming from the road appears in various biblical stories,[[4]](#footnote-4) where its purpose is to cleanse the feet of dirt. Some scholars have assumed that this is also the meaning of washing hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting and the altar, i.e., cleansing oneself of dirt before standing in the holy place and before God.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, it should be noted that nowhere in the Bible is hand cleansing mentioned in this context. Hand washing appears in the Bible exclusively in cultic and religious contexts.[[6]](#footnote-6) The expression ‘clean hands’ appears in the book of Psalms as a prerequisite for entering a holy place:

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. (Ps. 24:3-4)

Similarly, in Ps. 26:6: “I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, Lord.” We find something similar in a slightly different context in the passage about the *eglah arufah* (the ceremony of the broken-necked heifer) in Deuteronomy:

Then all the elders of the town nearest to the corpse shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi, and they shall make this declaration: ‘Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Absolve, O Lord your people Israel, whom you redeemed, and do not quilt for the blood of the innocent remain among your people Israel. And they will be absolved of bloodguilt. (Deut. 21:6-8)

(ו) וְכֹל זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהִוא הַקְּרֹבִים אֶל הֶחָלָל יִרְחֲצוּ אֶת יְדֵיהֶם עַל הָעֶגְלָה הָעֲרוּפָה בַנָּחַל. (ז) וְעָנוּ וְאָמְרוּ יָדֵינוּ לֹא שפכה שָׁפְכוּ אֶת הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ. (ח) כַּפֵּר לְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ ה’ וְאַל תִּתֵּן דָּם נָקִי בְּקֶרֶב עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִכַּפֵּר לָהֶם הַדָּם.

These verses reflect a custom known also from Hellenistic literature and additional sources from the Second Temple period,[[7]](#footnote-7) in which one who wishes to enter the holy washes his hands to testify to his status as a person who dissociates himself from any evil deed.

In light of this, there is reason to conclude that washing the hands and feet is an action of a cultic nature, a symbolic washing intended to testify to the priest's status as morally clean. However, this explanation is not without difficulty in light of the fact that in all these sources only hand washing is mentioned.

A third suggestion can be made, according to which this is an act of sanctification in preparation for the service. Not washing to cleanse from something that happened in the past, but a cultic washing that sanctifies the priest for the future, for the service. We find washing that aims to sanctify priests before entering the temple in the command to Aaron and his sons to wash their entire bodies during the days of ordination:[[8]](#footnote-8) “Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water.” (Exod. 29:4) Similarly, we find the command for Aaron to wash his body twice on the Day of Atonement.[[9]](#footnote-9) In these cases, it is indeed about washing the entire body,[[10]](#footnote-10) but it can be understood that washing the hands and feet replaces the washing of the entire body in this symbolic act of sanctification.

We found a similar model in the commands for priestly sanctification during the days of ordination, where Moses put blood “on the lobe of their right ear and on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot” (Lev. 8:24). Milgrom suggested that these organs represent the entire body and personality, just as the horns of the altar represent the entire altar.[[11]](#footnote-11)

# **Sources from the Second Temple Period**

## **3.1 ‘Aramaic Levi Document’, ‘Book of Jubilees’ and ‘Temple Scroll’**

The necessity of washing the hands and feet before offering sacrifices appears in several Jewish writings from the Second Temple period. In the Aramaic Levi Document, it is written:

And when you are about to enter the Sanctuary wash in water and then put on the priestly garments. And when you are robed, lave your hands and feet again before you approach the altar. At all. And when you are about to sacrifice anything fitting to offer up on the altar, wash your hands and feet once again. (7:1-3)[[12]](#footnote-13)

(1) וכדי תהוי קאים למיעל לבית אל הוי סחי במיא ובאדין תהוי לביש לבוש כהנותא. (2) וכדי תהוי לביש הוי תאיב תוב ורחיע ידיך ורגליך עד דלא תקרב למדבחא כל דנה. (3) וכדי תהוי נסב להקרבה כל די חזה להנסקה למדבחה הוי עוד תאב ורחע ידיך ורגליך.

As can be seen, there is a requirement here for both washing the entire body and washing the hands and feet.[[13]](#footnote-14) This also appears in the Book of Jubilees:

And at all times be clean in your body. And wash yourself with water before you approach to present an offering on the altar; and wash your hands and your feet before you draw near to the altar; and when you are done making an offering, wash your hands and feet again. (Jub. 21:16-17)[[14]](#footnote-16)

ובכול עת היה טהור בבשרך. ורחצת במים בטרם תלך להקטיר על המזבח, ורחצת ידיך ורגליך בטרם תקריב אל המזבח, ובעת אשר תכלה להקריב ורחצת עוד ידיך ורגליך.

The custom of immersing before entering the Temple is well documented, as many have noted,[[15]](#footnote-17) in additional sources from the Second Temple period, the writings of Philo and Josephus, apocryphal texts, and Qumran scrolls. It is also mentioned in the Mishnah: “No one may enter the Temple court for the service, even if he is clean, until he has immersed himself.” (mYom. 3:3)

Finkelstein has suggested that the origin of this tradition lies in an interpretation that attempted to explain the length to which the Torah goes in Exod. 30:19-21.[[16]](#footnote-19) There, the Torah repeats the matter of washing three times:

And let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and their feet from it. When they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, that they not die. Or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to the Lord, that they shall wash their hands and feet, that they not die.

וְרָחֲצוּ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת רַגְלֵיהֶם.

בְּבֹאָם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִרְחֲצוּ מַיִם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ אוֹ בְגִשְׁתָּם אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשָׁרֵת לְהַקְטִיר אִשֶּׁה לַה.

וְרָחֲצוּ יְדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ.

According to Finkelstein’s claim, an early tradition interpreted the first and third commands as a requirement for a double sanctification of hands and feet, one before the offering and one after; and the sentence “When they go into the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, lest they die,” as teaching about the obligation to immerse. This suggestion may clarify why the washing of hands and feet was intended only for the service and not for the mere entry into the holy place.

Schiffman raised another suggestion, that the obligation of immersion is rooted in the understanding that the commandment for Aaron to immerse before putting on the garments (Lev. 16:4) is not unique to the Day of Atonement.[[17]](#footnote-21)

However, even if the obligation of immersion was based on those verses, it is likely that it is rooted primarily in extra-biblical traditions that required immersion before entering a holy place, and it is likely that what underlies the practice is the feeling that moving from profane to sacred space requires sanctification and purification, even if not in the ritual and functional sense.[[18]](#footnote-22)

Either way, why is there a need, according to the Aramaic Levi Document and the Book of Jubilees, both to immerse and to wash hands and feet? This issue requires particular attention regarding Jubilees. In the Aramaic Levi Document, it is explicitly stated that immersion of the whole body is for entering the Temple, while washing hands and feet is for approaching the altar, whether due to proximity to the altar itself or the act of offering on the altar.[[19]](#footnote-23) In contrast, in Jubilees, the Temple is not mentioned, and we find that both washing the entire body and washing the hands and feet are for approaching the altar. However, in fact, the question of the need for both actions exists even according to the Aramaic Levi Document, because if the priest has washed his entire body, even if it was done for another purpose, why does he need to again wash his hands and feet?

It is possible that we need not look for a precise functional explanation for each of the actions, and that this is a purification practice originating from a variety of customs, traditions, and sources. In the Bible the instruction to wash hands and feet appears, and extra-biblical traditions required immersion before entering holy places. The Aramaic Levi Document, and following it Jubilees, combined these different traditions.[[20]](#footnote-24)

However, there is room to suggest that washing the entire body in these sources was intended to sanctify the body before entry and offering, while the role of washing hands and feet was to physically cleanse from dirt, while close to the actual offering. Some support for this can be brought from the fact that in both sources there is also a requirement to wash the hands and feet again after the service. In the Aramaic Levi Document it is stated after the description of the blood service on the altar: “And wash your hands and feet again from the blood.” (8:2)[[21]](#footnote-26) In Jubilees it is said: “And when you are done making an offering, wash your hands and feet again. And no blood shall be seen upon you or upon your clothes.” (21:16-17)[[22]](#footnote-28) This also appears in the Temple Scroll regarding the service of sin offerings: “And he shall wash his hands and his feet from the blood of the sin offering.”[[23]](#footnote-30) In all these sources, as Werman noted, it is emphasized that the purpose of these washings was to cleanse from the blood.[[24]](#footnote-32) If the washing after the service was intended to remove dirt, although it specifically refers to blood due to the special severity attributed to the power of blood in these sources,[[25]](#footnote-33) it is possible that the washing before the offering was also mainly for cleaning. Nevertheless, it seems that we have not completely resolved the precise question of how this action was perceived.

## **3.2. Philo of Alexandria[[26]](#footnote-34)**

Philo, in his work “The Life of Moses,” also refers to the washing of hands and feet:

These the master took thought good to take, and, after melting them down, construct therewith the lever and nothing else, to serve for lustration to priests who should enter the temple to perform the appointed rites, particularly for washing the hands and feet; a symbol, this, of a blameless life, of years of cleanliness employed… (II 138)[[27]](#footnote-36)

Here, Philo connects the commandment to wash hands and feet with the prevalent custom in Hellenistic culture[[28]](#footnote-37) which, as mentioned above, also has parallel roots in biblical wisdom literature, of washing the hands before entering sacred places as a symbol and proof of moral purity. Although washing of feet is not usually mentioned in these contexts, Philo nevertheless explained that the idea is similar.

It is interesting to note that according to Philo, even the owner of a sacrifice, who lays his hands on the animal, must wash his hands beforehand:[[29]](#footnote-38)

Secondly, the giver must wash his hands and lay them on the head of the victim... in the laying of hands on the head of the animal we find the clearest possible type of blameless actions ...so that as he lays his hands on the victim, he can boldly and with a pure conscience speak in this wise: ‘These hands have taken no gift to do injustice, nor have they shared in the proceeds of plunder or overreaching, nor been soiled with innocent blood.

None have they maimed or wounded, no deed of outrage or violence have they wrought.

Here too, the connection between hand-washing and moral cleanliness is evident.

Thus, according to Philo, the washing of hands and feet focuses on the priest’s obligation to be morally clean before approaching the sacred. It is possible that the reason for Philo’s interpretation is related to the fact that there are other actions which purify those entering the sanctuary. Elsewhere, he describes the preparations for entering the sanctuary and offering sacrifices:

As for the body, it purifies it with ablutions and sprinklings, and does not allow a person to be sprinkled and washed once for all and then pass straightway within the sacred precinct, but bids him stay outside for seven days, and be twice sprinkled on the third and seventh day, and after that, when he has bathed himself, it gives him full security to come within ant offer his sacrifice.[[30]](#footnote-40)

This is a clear description of sanctification before entry. The need for immersion before entry appears, as we have already noted, in many sources, but according to Philo, there is also a need to sprinkle the water of purification[[31]](#footnote-41) on the third and seventh days, similar to the purification of one who is impure from contact with the dead. Bittner dealt extensively with this tradition of sprinkling water before entering the sanctuary, and its traces also in rabbinic literature.[[32]](#footnote-43) Although this does not specifically refer to priests, it seems that priests were also required to purify their bodies when entering the sanctuary. In light of this, Philo determined that the purpose of hand and foot- washing is to attest to moral cleanliness.

# Tannaitic Literature – Sanctification (*kiddush*) of Hands and Feet

Several Tannaitic sources suggest that a priest who did not wash his hands and feet would be liable for death only if he performed service in the Temple, and that entry and approach to the Tent of Meeting and the altar without performing service was not strictly prohibited. For example:

And these are liable to death: one who eats *tevel*, a non-priest who ate *terumah*, an impure priest who ate pure *terumah*, and a non-priest, one who immersed that day, one lacking garments, one lacking atonement, one who did not wash hands and feet, those with unkempt hair, and those intoxicated by wine who served - all are liable to death. (tZev. 12:17)[[33]](#footnote-45)

ואלו הן שבמיתה האוכל טבל, וזר שאכל תרומה, וכהן טמא שאכל תרומה טהורה, וזר וטבול יום מחוסר בגדים ומחוסר כיפורים ושלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים ופרועי ראש ושתויי יין ששמשו כולן במיתה.

The entire list, including those who did not wash their feet, is specific to priests who served.[[34]](#footnote-46) In contrast, in the Mishnah, it is established that a priest who did not wash his hands and feet is prohibited from entering the *Heichal*:

The area between the entrance hall (*Ulam*) and the altar is more sacred than it, for those with blemishes and those with unkempt hair may not enter there. The *Heichal* is more sacred than it, for one may not enter there without washing hands and feet. The Holy of Holies is more sacred than them, for only the High Priest may enter there on Yom Kippur during the service. Rabbi Yose said: In five things, the area between the entrance hall (*Ulam*) and the altar is equal to the *Heichal*: those with blemishes, those with unkempt hair, those intoxicated by wine, and those who have not washed hands and feet may not enter there, and they withdraw from between the entrance hall (*Ulam*) and the altar during the incense offering. (mKel. 1:9)

בין האולם ולמזבח מקודש ממנה שאין בעלי מומין ופרועי ראש נכנסים לשם. ההיכל מקודש ממנו שאין נכנס לשם שלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים. קדש הקדשים מקודש מהם שאין נכנס לשם אלא כהן גדול ביום הכפורים בשעת העבודה. אמר רבי יוסי בחמשה דברים בין האולם ולמזבח שוה להיכל: שאין בעלי מומין ופרועי ראש ושתויי יין ושלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים נכנסים לשם, ופורשין מבין האולם ולמזבח בשעת הקטרה.

Both the first Tanna and Rabbi Yose agree that the sanctity of the *Heichal* is expressed in that one who has not washed his hands and feet is prohibited from entering there. Rabbi Yose adds to this those with blemishes, those with unkempt hair, and those intoxicated by wine, and the dispute between them is regarding those with blemishes and those with unkempt hair, who according to the first Tanna are already prohibited from entering the area between the entrance hall (*Ulam*) and the altar.[[35]](#footnote-47)

There is room to consider whether these sources represent different approaches among the Tannaim, or perhaps the Sages distinguished between the liability for death, which indeed refers only to service, and the prohibition of entry, which is also forbidden but less severe.[[36]](#footnote-48)

In any case, the biblical commandment regarding the washing of hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting or working on the altar is expressed in the Mishnah in several places. For example, in this description of the Temple service:

He who won the right to clear the altar shall clear it. They say to him: Be careful not to touch any vessel before you sanctify your hands and feet from the laver [...] He sanctified his hands and feet from the laver. (mTam. 1:4)

מי שזכה לתרום את המזבח הוא יתרום את המזבח. אומרין לו: היזהר שמא תיגע בכלי עד שתקדש ידיך ורגליך מן הכיור [...] קידש ידיו ורגליו מן הכיור.

The Mishnah describes the sanctification of the hands and feet of the one who won the first lottery for the Lifting of the Ashes (*Terumat HaDeshen*). Another description of the sanctification of hands and feet appears later in 2:1, regarding the priests who ascended the altar immediately after the removal of ashes and cleared the ashes to the *tappuach* (a pile on the altar). From here on, the tractate no longer mentions the sanctification of hands and feet for the other priests who won the lottery, relying on what was stated at the beginning of the tractate.

The action is called here, and generally in Tannaitic literature, “sanctification” (*kiddush*).[[37]](#footnote-49) This is the case, among others, throughout Tractate Yoma, which describes numerous sanctifications performed by the High Priest during the day.

Alongside this, there are Tannaitic sources that still refer to the action as washing *(rachatz(.* For example, “for one may not enter there without washing hands and feet” (mKel. 1:9) and “who did not wash hands and feet.” (mZev. 1:2)

It is interesting to note the following passage:

Priests who did not immerse and did not sanctify their hands and feet,[[38]](#footnote-51) and likewise a High Priest who did not immerse and did not sanctify his hands and feet between one service and another...

Both a High Priest and a common priest who served in the morning without washing hands and feet are liable to death, as it is said, “When they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash, etc.”

If one was standing and offering all night by its light, he requires sanctification of hands and feet. Rabbi says: Overnight invalidates the sanctification of hands and feet... (tKip. 1:17-19)[[39]](#footnote-52)

כהנים שלא טבלו ולא קדשו ידיהם ורגליהם וכן כהן גדול שלא טבל ולא קדש ידיו ורגליו בין עבדה לעבדה...

אחד כהן גדול ואחד כהן הדיוט ששימשו שחרית שלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים חייבין מיתה שנ’ בבאם אל אהל מועד ירחצו וגו’.

היה עומד ומקריב כל הלילה לאורה טעון קדוש ידים ורגלים רבי או’ הלינה פוסלת בקידוש ידים ורגלים...

In halakhah 17, it is established that the sanctification of hands and feet between different parts of the service on Yom Kippur is not essential. The action is called sanctification *(kiddush)* here. In halakhah 18, it is stated that priests who served “without washing hands and feet” are liable to death. Here, the verb “wash” (*rachatz*( is used. In halakhah 19, there is a dispute regarding the law for a priest who worked all night without sleeping, and again the action is called sanctification (*kiddush*). Both terms also appear together in the Tosefta

If one burned [the red heifer] without washing hands and feet, it is invalid, but Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon declare it valid, as it is said, when they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Thus, the sanctification of hands and feet is only required inside. (tPar. 4:4)[[40]](#footnote-54)

שרפה שלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים פסולה ור’ אלעזר ור’ שמעון מכשירין שנ’ בבואם אל אוהל מועד ירחצו מים ולא ימותו הא אין קידוש ידים ורגלים אלא לפנים.

On one hand, it is clear that the verb “wash” (*rachatz*) is evidenced earlier in relation to this action, as it appears in the Bible and pre-Tannaitic literature. On the other hand, I do not think we can determine that the Tannaitic sources that call the action “washing” are necessarily earlier than those terming it “sanctification”. The very fact that even Mishnayot like Tractate Tamid, considered an early Mishnah,[[41]](#footnote-55) use the verb “sanctify” (*kiddush*) can teach us that the Tannaim continued to use both verbs in parallel.[[42]](#footnote-56)

In any case, it should be noted that the Tannaim referred only to the washing of hands and feet as sanctification, while the washing of the entire body is never called “*kiddush*” by them. This point is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that in both the Bible and Second Temple literature, alongside the verb “*rachatz*” (wash), which is certainly the most common, there are cases where the verb “*kadesh*” (sanctify) is used for washing the entire body. For example:

(2) It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof **a woman bathing**; the woman was very beautiful. (3) David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, “This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” (4) So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (**Now she was purifying herself after her period.**) Then she returned to her house. (2 Sam. 11:2-4)

(ב) וַיְהִי לְעֵת הָעֶרֶב וַיָּקָם דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ עַל גַּג בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ **וַיַּרְא אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת** מֵעַל הַגָּג וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה מְאֹד. (ג) וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד וַיִּדְרֹשׁ לָאִשָּׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא זֹאת בַּת שֶׁבַע בַּת אֱלִיעָם אֵשֶׁת אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי. (ד) וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד מַלְאָכִים וַיִּקָּחֶהָ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ **וְהִיא מִתְקַדֶּשֶׁת מִטֻּמְאָתָהּ** וַתָּשָׁב אֶל בֵּיתָהּ.

The parallel here between “bathing” (*rochetzet*) in verse 2 and “purifying” (*mitkaddeshet*) in verse 4 is clear. Similarly:

(17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the center, eating the flesh of pigs, vermin, and rodents, shall come to an end together, says the Lord. (Isa. 66:17)

(יז) הַמִּתְקַדְּשִׁים וְהַמִּטַּהֲרִים אֶל הַגַּנּוֹת אַחַר אחד אַחַת בַּתָּוֶךְ אֹכְלֵי בְּשַׂר הַחֲזִיר וְהַשֶּׁקֶץ וְהָעַכְבָּר יַחְדָּו יָסֻפוּ נְאֻם ה’.

This also appears in the Community Rule scroll regarding one who rejects the covenant:

He shall not be counted among the perfect ones, nor be purified by atonements, nor be cleansed by purifying waters, nor be sanctified by seas and rivers, nor be cleansed by any ablution water.[[43]](#footnote-58)

בעין תמימים לא יתחשב לוא יזכה בכפורים ולוא יטהר במי נדה ולוא יתקדש בימים ובנהרות ולוא יטהר בכל מי רחצ.

Immersion in a sea or river is defined here as sanctification, while the use of purifying waters (ashes of the red heifer) is defined as purification. Note that the use of ‘ablution water’ is also defined as purification, although it is not entirely clear what this refers to. It is possible that this refers to the sprinkling of water on the body before entering holy places.[[44]](#footnote-59) Later in the same passage, the distinction between sprinkling water and immersion is repeated:

Let him not purify his flesh for sprinkling with purifying waters (mei niddah) nor sanctify himself with purification waters. [[45]](#footnote-61)

אל יטהר בשרו להזות במי נדה ולהתקדש במי דוכי.

It should be noted that in all these sources, both in the Bible and in the Community Rule Scroll, sanctification simply means purification. The action is called sanctification, but its meaning is to purify oneself from the impurity that has adhered to a person in the past. This is also evident from the use of the verb *kadesh* in the Thanksgiving Scroll:

And for the sake of your glory you have purified man from transgression that he may consecrate himself for You from all impure abominations. [[46]](#footnote-63)

ולמען כבודכה טהרתה אנוש מפשע להתקדש לכה מכול תועבות נדה

Here, ‘to consecrate oneself’ means to purify oneself.

In contrast, as mentioned, in both Tannaitic and Amoraic literature, washing is never defined as sanctification except for when it is the washing of hands and feet.

Indeed, it seems that in this literature, there is not just a linguistic separation between two different actions, but also a fundamental determination that washing is about sanctification in preparation for the encounter with the holy, and not about purification related to the past. This concept is expressed in several sources that we will now investigate.

1. The Mishnah explicitly links the additional holiness of the place the priest enters with the need for sanctification of hands and feet:

The area between the Ulam and the altar is more sacred than it, for those with blemishes and those with unkempt hair may not enter there. The Heichal is more sacred than it, for one may not enter there without washing hands and feet. The Holy of Holies is more sacred than them, for only the High Priest may enter there on Yom Kippur during the service. Rabbi Yose said: In five things, the area between the Ulam and the altar is equal to the Heichal: those with blemishes, those with unkempt hair, those intoxicated by wine, and those who have not washed hands and feet may not enter there, and they withdraw from between the Ulam and the altar during the incense offering. (mKel. 1:9)

בין האולם ולמזבח מקודש ממנה שאין בעלי מומין ופרועי ראש נכנסים לשם. ההיכל מקודש ממנו שאין נכנס לשם שלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים. קדש הקדשים מקודש מהם שאין נכנס לשם אלא כהן גדול ביום הכפורים בשעת העבודה. אמר רבי יוסי בחמשה דברים בין האולם ולמזבח שוה להיכל: שאין בעלי מומין ופרועי ראש ושתויי יין ושלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים נכנסים לשם, ופורשין מבין האולם ולמזבח בשעת הקטרה.

Two parameters appear here to distinguish between different degrees of holiness: the types of people who can enter, and the washing of hands and feet. Just as the extra holiness of the Holy of Holies prevents entry into the place throughout the year, so does the extra holiness of the *Heichal* prevent entry without the sanctification conferred by washing of the hands and feet.

2. In the biblical description of the Sotah offering, it is said:

The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take and put into the water. (Num. 5:17)

וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מַיִם קְדֹשִׁים בִּכְלִי חָרֶשׂ וּמִן הֶעָפָר אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּקַרְקַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן וְנָתַן אֶל הַמָּיִם

In Sifre this is interpreted as follows:[[47]](#footnote-64)

‘And the priest shall take holy water’ - ‘Holy’ only means that which was sanctified in a vessel, and these are the waters of the laver. (Sifre Num. 10)

ולקח הכהן מים קדושים, אין קדושים אלא שקידשו בכלי ואלו הם אלו מי כיור.

The uniqueness of these waters is that they became holy as a result of contact with the laver. Similarly, in Sifre Zuta: “‘Holy water’ - sanctified from the laver.” (5:17)[[48]](#footnote-66) מים קדושים – מקודשין מן הכיור. The assumption that the water from the laver is holy water is expressed in the Mishnah:

Ben Katin made twelve spouts for the laver which had only two, and he also made a machine for the laver, that its water should not become unfit by remaining overnight. (mYom. 3:10)

בן קטין עשה שנים עשר דד לכיור שלא היו לו אלא שנים ואף הוא עשה מוכני לכיור שלא יהיו מימיו נפסלין בלינה.

According to the Mishnah, the law of overnight disqualification, which usually appears in relation to things intended for offering on the altar, also applies in relation to the water of the laver.

In another Mishnah, it is made explicit that the sanctification of water from the holy vessel in the Temple is what causes this:

The procedure on weekdays and on the Sabbath was the same, except that on the eve of the Sabbath they used to fill a golden flask that had not been sanctified with water from Siloam and place it in a chamber. If it was spilled or uncovered, they would fill it from the laver, for wine and water which have been left uncovered are unfit for the altar. (mSuk. 4:10)[[49]](#footnote-67)

כמעשהו בחול כך מעשהו בשבת אלא שהיה ממלא מערב שבת חבית של זהב שאינה מקודשת מן השילוח ומניחה בלשכה. נשפכה או נתגלתה היה ממלא מן הכיור שהיין והמים המגולין פסולים לגבי מזבח.

Following this assumption, the following Baraita established that these waters can also be sanctified in another holy vessel:

Come and hear: One who has not washed his hands and feet may sanctify them in a sacred vessel inside [the Temple courtyard]. If he sanctified them in a sacred vessel outside, or in a non-sacred vessel inside, or if he immersed in cave water and served - his service is invalid. (tZev. 20b)

תא שמע: שלא רחוץ ידים ורגלים מקדש בכלי שרת בפנים, קידש בכלי שרת בחוץ או בכלי חול בפנים או שטבל במי מערה ועבד - עבודתו פסולה

The assumption, then, is that the laver, which was indeed anointed with oil and sanctified like all the vessels in the Tabernacle, is not just a water storage vessel, but the water in it has been sanctified and therefore it can sanctify those who wash from it.

3.It seems that this conception is the basis for the following interpretation:

‘And Moses brought Aaron and his sons near and washed them with water’ [Lev. 8:6] - At that hour they merited the sanctification of hands and feet, at that hour he merited the immersion of Yom Kippur. (Mekhilta de-Millu’im 1:1, 41a)[[50]](#footnote-69)

(ה) ויקרב משה את אהרן ואת בניו וירחץ אותם במים - אתה שעה זכו בקידוש ידים ורגלים, אתה שעה זכה בטבילת יום הכפורים.

The *darshan* (rabbinic expositor) here sees a connection between the immersion of Aaron and his sons during the days of consecration - an immersion that was not intended to negate any impurity but to sanctify them before entering the service at the altar and in the Tent of Meeting - and the sanctification of hands and feet for future generations.[[51]](#footnote-70) In light of the fact that there is no commandment in the Torah for immersion before daily work in the Tabernacle, the interpretation assumes that the sanctification of hands and feet is actually a substitute for that immersion of the days of consecration and it too is intended to sanctify the priest before the service.

4. The multiplicity of sanctifications during the work of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, as appears in the Mishnah and Tannaitic literature, probably stems from this conception as well. According to the description in mYoma, the High Priest would immerse five times during the service and sanctify ten or eleven times.[[52]](#footnote-71) While in the biblical passage there is a command for double washing, at the beginning of the work and at the end of the main work related to the sin offerings, the Tannaim speak of five immersions that the High Priest would perform during the work, each time changing his clothes, and of two sanctifications around each immersion. As I have shown extensively, these immersions and sanctifications were not intended to purify the priest from any impurity, but rather to distinguish between the different parts of the service, with each part requiring a ritual immersion to mark the boundary between it and the other parts, as if we are facing a completely new service.[[53]](#footnote-73)

4. “Whatever touches the altar shall become holy” - Sanctification of Hands and Feet?

As we have seen, the use of the verb “sanctify” (*kadesh*) for washing the hands and feet in Tannaitic literature teaches us that the Tannaim perceived the meaning of the action as sanctification in preparation for the service. But is there also a biblical background for the use of this verb?

The phrase “**Whatever** touches... shall become holy” appears twice in the context of the descriptions of the Tabernacle’s dedication in Exodus. First:

For seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy. **Whatever touches the altar shall become holy. (**Exod. 29:37)

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תְּכַפֵּר עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתוֹ וְהָיָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים **כָּל הַנֹּגֵעַ בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ יִקְדָּשׁ**.

Second, after describing the anointing of various vessels, it says:

You shall consecrate them so that they may be most holy; **whatever touches them will become holy. (Exod.** 30:29)

וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים **כָּל הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ”.**

Similar expressions also appear in Leviticus regarding the law of the grain offering:

Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it. It is a perpetual due throughout your generations, from the Lord’s offerings by fire; **anything that touches them shall become holy. (Lev.** 6:11)

כָּל זָכָר בִּבְנֵי אַהֲרֹן יֹאכֲלֶנָּה חָק עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם מֵאִשֵּׁי **ה’ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ**

Also regarding the flesh of the sin offering:

**Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy**; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place. (Lev. 6:20)

**כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע בִּבְשָׂרָהּ יִקְדָּשׁ** וַאֲשֶׁר יִזֶּה מִדָּמָהּ עַל הַבֶּגֶד אֲשֶׁר יִזֶּה עָלֶיהָ תְּכַבֵּס בְּמָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ.

What is the meaning of “become holy” (*yikdash*) in these verses? Does it describe a (passive) result of sanctification, or perhaps an imperative demand to sanctify oneself? The common interpretation among modern commentators for these verses is that they reflect the concept of ‘contagious holiness’ that appears in the Bible in several contexts, according to which, just as impurity has the ability to spread from person to person and from object to object, so does holiness, where such sanctification can also be dangerous and destructive.[[54]](#footnote-74)

On the other hand, among several medieval commentators, a different interpretation prevailed, according to which the intention of the verses in this matter is not to the result but to the preparation: one who approaches the altar needs to sanctify himself beforehand.[[55]](#footnote-76) Several scholars, who assumed that this interpretation deviates from a simple reading of the text, and is not even expressed in Tannaitic literature, have discussed the motives for this interpretation.[[56]](#footnote-78)

Generally speaking, scholars have assumed that the Tannaim[[57]](#footnote-80) also understood these verses as referring to the result of sanctification.[[58]](#footnote-81) However, these scholars have pointed out that the Tannaitic conception significantly limited the idea of “contagious holiness,” and effectively uprooted the original biblical concept. As a result, according to this interpretation, the altar no longer ‘transmits’ holiness to other objects. This can be seen in the Mishnah in Zevahim, which states that only specific types of disqualified sacrifices that were already placed on the altar may be offered, as they have become part of the altar’s domain. Moreover, in cases where the blood of a sin offering comes into contact with a vessel or garment, only the specific area that came into contact with the blood requires washing or cleaning. Thus, the original concept of contagious holiness has been replaced with a more limited principle of ‘absorbed prohibition’[[59]](#footnote-82)

However, it seems that regarding Tannaitic literature, to understand how these verses were interpreted we must first distinguish between early and late interpretations, and take into account additional sources that were not discussed in the existing research in this context.[[60]](#footnote-83)

Chapter nine of Tractate Zevahim opens with the statement “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it” (מזבח מקדש את הראוי לו) and then throughout the chapter several disputes appear between Tannaim from the Yavneh and Usha generations regarding the details of this law. At the beginning of the chapter, a dispute between Rabbi Joshua and Rabban Gamaliel is presented:

The altar sanctifies that which is fit for it.

Rabbi Joshua says: Anything that is fit for the fires [of the altar], if it went up, shall not come down, as it is said “on its firewood,” just as the burnt offering which is fit for the fires, if it went up shall not come down, so too anything that is fit for the fires, if it went up shall not come down.

Rabban Gamaliel says: Anything that is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down, as it is said “it is the burnt offering upon the firewood upon the altar,” just as the burnt offering which is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down, so too anything that is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down.

The only difference between Rabban Gamaliel’s words and Rabbi Joshua’s words concerns the blood and the libations, which Rabban Gamaliel says shall not come down while Rabbi Joshua says shall come down.

Rabbi Shimon says: If the sacrifice is valid but the libations are invalid, or if the libations are valid but the sacrifice is invalid, or even if both are invalid - the sacrifice shall not come down but the libations shall come down.

המזבח מקדש את הראוי לו.

רבי יהושע אומר: כל הראוי לאשים אם עלה לא ירד שנאמר “על מוקדה”, מה עולה שהיא ראויה לאשים אם עלת לא תרד, אף כל דבר שהוא ראוי לאשים אם עלה לא ירד.

רבן גמליאל אומר: כל הראוי למזבח אם עלה לא ירד שנאמר “היא העולה על מוקדה על המזבח” מה עולה שהיא ראויה למזבח אם עלת לא תרד, אף כל דבר שהוא ראוי למזבח אם עלה לא ירד.

אין בין דברי רבן גמליאל לדברי רבי יהושע אלא הדם והנסכים שרבן גמליאל אומר לא ירדו ורבי יהושע אומר ירדו.

רבי שמעון אומר הזבח כשר והנסכים פסולין, הנסכים כשרין והזבח פסול אפילו זה וזה פסול הזבח לא ירד והנסכים ירדו.

The statement “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it” is undoubtedly based on the verse “whatever touches the altar shall become holy,” (Exod. 29:37) as is also explicitly evident in the Sifra interpretation that we will see below. These Tannaim interpreted the verse, as we noted above, as describing an outcome - what touches becomes sanctified. Albeck adopted Rashi’s explanation (Zev. 83a s.v. “Rabbi Joshua”) that Rabbi Joshua and Rabban Gamaliel, the sages of Yavneh, disagreed about the interpretation of the statement “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it” and suggested that this was actually an ancient law about whose details later generations disagreed.[[61]](#footnote-85) Later in the chapter, more disputes on this topic appear between Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Shimon, from the Usha generation, and at the end of the chapter the Mishnah determines that not only does the altar sanctify, but also the ramp and the vessels sanctify. Thus, different generations of Tannaim discussed the details of the ancient law “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it.”

However, examination of the parallel in the Sifra can teach us about a much more complex picture regarding how different generations of sages interpreted these verses. The discussion appears so:[[62]](#footnote-86)

Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: Since it is said “whatever touches the altar shall become holy,” I might understand [this applies to] things that are fit for the altar and things that are not fit for the altar? Scripture therefore states “lambs,” just as lambs are specifically fit for the altar, this excludes anything that is not fit for the altar.

Rabbi Akiva says: Since it is said “whatever touches the altar shall become holy,” I might understand [this applies to] things that are fit for the altar and things that are not fit for the altar? Scripture therefore states “burnt offering,” just as the burnt offering is specifically fit for the altar, this excludes those things that are not fit for the altar.

Rabbi Joshua says: Anything that is fit for the fires, if it went up shall not come down, as it is said “it is the burnt offering upon the firewood,” just as the burnt offering which is fit for the fires, if it went up shall not come down, so too anything that is fit for the fires, if it went up shall not come down.

Rabban Gamaliel says: Anything that is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down, as it is said “it is the burnt offering upon the firewood upon the altar,” just as the burnt offering which is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down, so too anything that is fit for the altar, if it went up shall not come down.

The only difference between Rabban Gamaliel’s words and Rabbi Joshua’s words concerns the blood and the libations, which Rabban Gamaliel says shall come down while Rabbi Joshua says shall not come down. (Sifra Tzav, Chapter 1)

ר’ יוסה הגלילי אומר בתוך שנא’ “כל הנוגע במזבח יקדש”, שומע אני דברים שהן ראויים למזבח ודברים שאינן ראויין למזבח? תל’ לו’ “כבשים”, מה כבשים מיוחדים שהן ראויים למזבח יצא דבר שאינו ראוי למזבח.

ר’ עקיבה או’ בתוך שנ’ “כל הנוגע במזבח יקדש” שומע אני דברים שהן ראויים למזבח ודברים שאינן ראויים למזבח תל’ לו’ עולה, מה עולה מיוחדת שהיא ראויה למזבח, יצא אילו שאינן ראויים למזבח.

רבי יהושוע או’ כל הראוי לאישים אם עלה לא ירד, שנ’ “היא העולה על מוקדה” מה העולה שהיא ראויה לאישים אם עלת לא תרד, ואף כל דבר שהיא ראוי לאישים אם עלה לא ירד.

רבן גמליאל או’ כל הראוי למזבח אם עלה לא ירד שנ’ היא “העלה על מוקדה על המזבח” מה העולה שהיא ראויה למזבח אם עלת לא תרד, ואף כל דבר שהוא ראוי למזבח, אם עלה לא ירד.

אין בין דברי רבן גמליאל לדברי רבי יהושע אילא הדם והנסכים שרבן גמליאל או’ ירדו ירדו ורבי יהושע אומר לא ירדו.[[63]](#footnote-87)

Note that, unlike in the Mishnah, in the Sifra a discussion between Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva is presented first, and only afterward the dispute between Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua. Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva explicitly assume that the expression “whatever touches... shall become holy” teaches that meat in various conditions becomes sanctified if it goes up onto the altar. Rashi explained that their dispute relates to the interpretation of the verses in Exodus 29 dealing with the daily offering. Rabbi Yose the Galilean derives from the word ‘lambs’, apparently referring to the verse : “And this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two lambs a year old day by day continually.” (Exod. 29:38) In contrast, Rabbi Akiva expounds the word ‘burnt offering.’ Since the word ‘burnt offering’ is not mentioned in verse 38, Rashi explained that the intention is not to the word ‘burnt offering’ but to the fact that ‘burnt offering is written in this verse’, meaning the burnt offering mentioned in this verse. D. Sabato[[64]](#footnote-88) noted that this interpretation might indicate a different version from the Masoretic text that was before the Tannaim, and to his words one should add that this indeed appears in the Samaritan version.

In any case, particularly in light of the words of Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva, who indeed focus on the verse Exod. 29:37, the fact that Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua, who agree with the halakhic principle that an invalid item that is fit for the altar is offered there, do not mention at all the verse “whatever touches the altar shall become holy” is very striking. Instead, they learn the law from the verse in Leviticus regarding the burnt offering: “it is the burnt offering upon the firewood upon the altar.” (Lev. 6:2) Even the expression they use, “if it went up shall not come down,” is taken from this verse which emphasizes the ‘burnt offering.’ The root ‘q-d-sh’ (sanctify) does not appear in their words.

This may also be the reason why the words of Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva appear before the words of Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua, who preceded them: first, the editor of the Sifra quoted the sages who indeed learned the law from Exod. 29:37, assuming this was the main source in light of the Mishnah’s phrasing “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it.” Only afterward did he quote another source in which a similar dispute appears that is indeed earlier but refers to different verses.

It may be learned from this that Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua, sages who lived at the end of the Second Temple period and the beginning of the post-destruction generation, did not interpret the verse “whatever touches the altar shall become holy” as referring to a result of sanctification. Although these sages also believed that the altar indeed ‘captures’ invalid sacrifices, the source for this in their opinion is Lev. 6:2.

According to this suggestion, and contrary to Albeck’s claim, the statement “the altar sanctifies that which is fit for it” is not an ancient law about whose details sages from the beginning of the Yavneh generation disagreed, as might be mistakenly understood from the order of things in the Mishnah, but rather a later formulation by later sages from the Yavneh generation, such as Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva.[[65]](#footnote-89) The early law specifically did not interpret the verse “whatever touches the altar shall become holy” in the sense of an outcome such that the altar sanctifies, in one way or another.

But if so, how did Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua interpret this verse?

One might suggest that alongside the explicit command regarding washing the hands and feet in Exod. 30:18-21, the sages who preceded the central Yavneh generation understood that “whatever touches the altar shall become holy” (Exod. 30:18-21, and its parallels in Exod. 30:29 and Lev. 6) actually deals with the command to wash the hands and feet, and therefore this action was called ‘sanctification” (*kiddush*). Indeed, one should note the language of the Mishnah in the following:

He who won the right to clear the altar shall clear it. They say to him: Be careful not to touch any vessel until you sanctify your hands and feet from the laver... He sanctified his hands and feet from the laver... (mTam. 1:4)

מי שזכה לתרום את המזבח הוא יתרום את המזבח. אומרין לו: היזהר שמא תיגע בכלי עד שתקדש ידיך ורגליך מן הכיור...קידש ידיו ורגליו מן הכיור...

The concern expressed here about not touching the sacred vessels before sanctifying the hands and feet could certainly reflect the concern over the sacred vessels, as evident from comparing the language of Exodus with the language of the Mishnah:[[66]](#footnote-90)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| שמות ל, כט | משנה תמיד א, ג-ד |
| וקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים **כָּל הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ** | מי שזכה לתרם את המזבח הוא יתרום את המזבח. אומרין לו:  הזהר **שמא תיגע בכלי עד שתקדש** ידיך ורגליך מן הכיור...קדש ידיו ורגליו מן הכיור... |

It is evident that the Mishnah here uses biblical language, and it seems that this is how this verse was interpreted in this period.

Why did these sages interpret ‘*yiqdash’* as referring to an action rather than a result? Scholars have asked a similar question regarding medieval sages, given the assumption that this is an unusual and unexpected interpretation. Some sought theological or polemical explanations for this matter,[[67]](#footnote-91) but M. Lockshin argued that the reason Rashbam and others interpreted it this way stemmed from a ‘naive’ reading of the text, and in their opinion, this is truly the plain meaning of the text. In Leviticus it is stated: “Every male among Aaron’s children may eat of it, as their due for all time throughout your generations from the Lord’s offerings by fire; whatever touches them shall become holy.” (Lev. 6:11) The first part of the verse restricts the eating of the meal offering, which the Torah discusses in these verses, specifically to priests. In light of this, it is logical to presume that the second part also deals with a restriction on contact with the sacred, requiring sanctification before eating the meal offering. If so, it is certainly reasonable that the sages, especially in the early Mishnaic period, read the expression ‘whatever touches shall become holy’ as commanding sanctification, and not as describing an outcome, because this was its apparent simple meaning. In any case, it is certainly possible that this interpretation of the verse forms the basis for the Tannaitic decision to call the washing of hands and feet ‘sanctification” (*kiddush*).

# Summary

The biblical obligation to wash the hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting and approaching the altar can be interpreted in various ways: cleansing from dirt before entering the sacred; a symbolic act of shaking off evil deeds; or washing that sanctifies the priest’s limbs and perhaps even his body before entering the sacred.

In Second Temple Period literature, one can see how this obligation was integrated into a broader system of purification acts required of those entering the Temple, especially the obligation of immersing the entire body even for those who were already pure, where it is not always clear whether the various authors assigned each action a separate and distinct role.

In Tannaitic literature, this action received a unique linguistic expression: ‘sanctification of hands and feet’ (*kiddush yadayim ve-raglayim*). As I have shown, the sages interpreted this commandment as sanctification in preparation for entering and approaching the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and because of this they required, among other things, that the water itself be sanctified in the Temple vessel before washing. It is very possible that the very fact that the action includes washing both the hands and the feet, a combination not found in other contexts in the Bible, led the Tannaim to interpret this as a unique commandment intended to prepare the priest for service. Following this, I argued that the use of the verb sanctify (*kadesh*), as an expression of this understanding, may also stem from the way the sages, at least in the early generations of the Tannaim, interpreted the verse “**whatever touches them shall become holy**,” in the sense of an action rather than a result.

1. All translations of biblical quotations are from the JPS Tanakh. All translations of other Hebrew sources are my own, according to the manuscripts and editions that will be mentioned later.

   The verb *'taval'* (טבל), common in rabbinic literature in the sense of washing the entire body at once, appears in the Bible only once – in the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. See A. S. Hartom, “Immersion,” *Biblical Encyclopedia 3*, Jerusalem 1958, p. 363 [Hebrew]. In the Bible, three other verbs appear to indicate an action of purifying the body: *'rachatz'* (רחץ), *'taher'* (טהר), and *'kadesh'* (קדש). Several scholars have noted that the biblical command for washing (which is the most common term for purification) does not necessarily mean immersing the body at once. Archaeological findings from the First Temple period in residential areas that were inhabited by Israelites did not reveal the use of water facilities for the purpose of immersing the whole body at once. See R. Reich, Miqwa'ot *in the Second Temple, Mishnaic, and Talmudic Periods,* Jerusalem 2013, pp. 15-17 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Exod. 29:44. Several scholars have seen in the description of the days of consecration in these verses and in Leviticus 8, in which the priests did not work and stayed in the Tabernacle for seven days, a reflection of a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred. See E. Leach , *Culture and Communication*, Cambridge 1976, pp. 78-93; J. Milgrom, *AB, Leviticus* 1-16, New York 1991, pp. 566-567. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Jerusalem 1969, p. 277; J. Milgrom, *AB, Leviticus 1-16*, New York 1991, p. 1830; W.H.C. Propp, *AB- Exodus* 19-40, New York, 2006, p. 480; J.I. Durham, *WBC Exodus*, Waco, 1987, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Jg. 19:21; 2 Sam. 11:8; Song 5:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 277; Durham, *Exodus*, p. 404 in the first interpretation; Propp, *Exodus*, p. 480; S. Ahituv, “Washing”, *Biblical Encyclopedia 7*, Jerusalem 1976, p. 354 [Hebrew]. This is also how Ramban explained in his commentary on the spot according to the plain meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Additionally, in several biblical passages the idea appears that washing hands is part of a process of abandoning the sin of bloodshed: Deut. 21:6; Isa. 1:15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Durham, *Exodus,* p. 404 in his second interpretation wrote that there is symbolism of purity in this. On the cleanliness of hands as a symbol of purity before entering sacred places and for prayer in Second Temple literature and in the Hellenistic world, see now the sources cited by Y. Furstenberg, *Purity and Community in Antiquity*, Jerusalem 2016, pp. 87-88 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. And in parallel, of course, in Exod. 40:12 and Lev. 8:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lev. 16:3, 23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Unlike Lev. 16:3, here it does not say “his flesh”, but from the context it seems that it refers to washing the entire body, as Rashi already pointed out (unlike Ibn Ezra on Lev. 8:6). So also, in Milgrom, *Leviticus,* p. 501 (referring to the parallel verse in Lev. 8:6) who concludes this from the wording “and wash them **in** water”, in contrast to, for example, Exod. 30:20’s “When they enter the tent of meeting, they are to wash with water” (without “in”). The latter explicitly states that it means washing hands and feet only. This proof was already brought by Malbim in his commentary on Lev. 8:6. It can indeed be understood that the washing is related to wearing the garments.[what garments?] In Lev. 16 too, Aaron's special washing appears in proximity to changing clothes. However, several scholars have argued that both the washing and wearing of the garments were intended to prepare the priest for entering the holy place. See Milgrom, *Leviticus,* pp. 1017, 1048-1049. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Before that, Milgrom brings another explanation raised by commentators and scholars, according to which there is specific significance to these organs: the ear because the priest needs to listen to God, the hands because with them he performs the holy duties, and the feet because he walks and treads in holy places. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. J. C. Greenfield, M.E. Stone and E. Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary*, [Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 19], Leiden, 2004, pp. 78-79 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. In verse 3, there appears to be another washing even before offering the sacrifice. For an extensive discussion of this instruction, see H. Maly, “Priestly Instructions in the Aramaic Levi Document and the Order of the Morning Daily Sacrifice”, *Meghillot* 14 (2019), pp. 119-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Hebrew text from [editor?], *Book of Jubilees: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Jerusalem 2015, p. 335). On the similarity between the writings and on the influence of the Aramaic Levi Document on Jubilees, see now Werman, ibid., pp. 21-25 and in the sources cited there in note 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
15. H. Albeck, *The Mishnah* **(commentary)**, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1953-1957, p. 467 [Hebrew]; S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage in the Second Temple Period - A Historical Monograph*, Tel Aviv, 1965, pp. 142-143 [Hebrew]; S. Safrai and Z. Safrai, *Mishnah Eretz Israel Tractate Yoma*, Jerusalem 2010, p. 90 note 235 [Hebrew]; Regev, *Miqvaot*, pp. 196-202 [Hebrew]; M. Kahana, *Sifre Numbers: An Annotated Edition*, 2011-2015, p. 299 [Hebrew]. See also V. Noam, *From Qumran to the Tannaitic Revolution*, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 210-213 [Hebrew]. E. Regev, “The Ritual Baths Near the Temple Mount and Extra-purification Before Entering the Temple Courts”, *IEJ* 55, 2 (2005), pp. 194-196 argued that the abundance of *mikvaot* found in excavations near the Temple Mount is further evidence of this practice. Since all ritual impurity in the Torah requires “waiting until sunset” (*herev shemesh*), so that even after immersion, purity is achieved only after the sun sets, it is likely that the impure did not immerse near the Temple Mount because they could not enter until the next day. Therefore, he concludes that these *mikvaot* were intended for any person who was not impure to immerse so that they could enter the Temple immediately. Later in the same text, he notes that from the literature of the period and rabbinic literature, one can only learn about immersion before entering the Temple court for those who took an active part in the service (even a non-priest), while in his opinion, the archaeological findings show that the custom included any entry, even to the women's court. Criticism of Regev's thesis appears in Y. Adler, “The Ritual Baths Near the Temple Mount and Extra-purification Before Entering the Temple Courts: A Reply to Eyal Regev”, *IEJ* 56, 2 (2006), pp. 209-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
16. L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, Philadelphia 1962, p. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
17. L.H. Schiffman, “Sacrificial Halakhah in the Fragments of the “Aramaic Levi Document” from Qumran, the Genizah, and Mt. Athos Monastery”, *STDJ* LVIII (2005), p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
18. See Regev, “Ritual Baths,” p. 201; Safrai & Safrai, *Mishnah Eretz Israel Tractate Yoma*, p. 90; H. Beytner, “ Sprinkling at the Temple Entrance: A Forgotten Temple Ritual”, *Tarbiz* 87, 3 (2020), pp. 354-355 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
19. This dilemma already exists in relation to the verses. See above, note 000. Regarding the Aramaic Levi Document, see the discussion by H. Maly, “Priestly Instructions in the Aramaic Levi Document and the Order of the Morning Daily Sacrifice “, *Meghillot:* 14 (2019), pp. 121-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
20. On a similar duplication, see Beytner, “Sprinkling at the Temple Entrance”. He concludes that in parallel with the custom of immersion before entering the Temple, it was also customary to sprinkle the ashes of the red heifer for this purpose. However, he does not offer an exact explanation of why both actions are needed. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
21. Aramaic Levi Document 8:2 (p. 82). See also there 6-7, 10 (ibid., p. 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
22. Book of Jubilees 21:16-17 (Werman ed., p. 335). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
23. Temple Scroll column 26, 10 (E. Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings* Vol. 1-3, Jerusalem, 2010-2015, p. 165). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
24. Werman in C. Werman and A. Shemesh, *[Revealing the Hidden: Exegeses and Halakha in the Qumran Scrolls](http://www.kotar.co.il/KotarApp/Viewer.aspx?nBookID=102175401)*, Jerusalem 2011, p. 338 [Hebrew]. Similarly in Milgrom, *Leviticus,* p. 1064 referring to the Temple Scroll. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees,* p. 275 argued that the washing was intended to remove the holiness that adhered to the priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
25. See C. Werman, “The Law of Covering Blood and Eating It in Priestly Halakha and in the Halakha of the Sages”, *Tarbiz* 63 (1994), pp. 173-183 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
26. Josephus, Antiquities III, 114 briefly refers to the commandment to build the laver and the obligation of washing. Similarly in Antiquities VIII, 87 (p. 275) regarding the sea that Solomon made. [if you have page numbers you need to specify which edition you’re using] [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
27. Translated by F.H. Colson, London 1994 (VI PP. 517). [reference in usual format please, with title] [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
28. See above, note 000. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
29. Philo, On the Special Laws I, 198-204 (VII pp. 213-215) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
30. Philo, On the Special Laws I, 260-261 (VII PP. 251). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
31. In other places in his writings, it is explicit that this refers to sprinkling of the water of purification. On Dreams, I, 214; On the Special Laws III, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
32. See above, note 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
33. And in parallels in tSanh. 14:16 (Zuckermande edition, p. 437), tKer. 1:5 (ibid., p. 561), and bZev. 83a. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
34. The *Tosafot* in Sanhedrin 83a (s.v. “*ve-lo mishum tumah*”), referring to this source, explain that the Sages read the verse (Exod. 28:43) such that the words “to minister in the holy place” also apply to the words “when they come to the Tent of Meeting.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
35. Albeck, *The Mishnah*, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1953-1957, p. 23, followed Maimonides’s commentary on the Mishnah, that according to Rabbi Yose there are ten levels of holiness, while according to the first Tanna there were eleven. Regarding the expression “between the Ulam and the altar” (and not “between the altar and the Ulam”), see Moshe Bar-Asher, “Traces of Biblical Language in the Mishnah,” in: A. Edrei et al. (eds.), *Studies in Talmud and Midrash Literature*, Jerusalem 2005, pp. 64-65 [Hebrew]. See also, Talmud Ha-Igud - *Sukkah* / with comprehensive commentary by M. Benovitz, Jerusalem 2013, pp. 97-102 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
36. For the entire matter, see Y. Marcus, “Restrictions on Entering the Temple: From the Bible to the Tannaitic Literature”, *Zion* 86, 1 (2021), pp. 5-30 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
37. D. Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, Tel Aviv 1979, p. 349 noted that rabbinic literature does not use the root קד”ש to indicate immersion of the entire body, but rather for washing the hands and feet. This was also noted by Y. Licht, *The Rule Scroll - A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
38. S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah, Mo'ed*, New York and Jerusalem, 2002, p. 745 [Hebrew], interpreted that the Tosefta refers to Mishnah 3:2 which stated: “This is the general rule in the Temple: anyone who covers his feet requires immersion, and anyone who urinates requires sanctification of hands and feet.” According to his suggestion, the Tosefta deals with a case where the priests did not immerse after covering and did not sanctify after urinating. However, his explanation seems forced in the language of the Tosefta and requires further examination. In any case, it seems that this difficulty was already before the formulators of the parallel Baraita in the bYom. 30b where they taught: “And it was taught: A High Priest who did not immerse and did not sanctify between garment and garment and between service and service, his service is **valid**.” It should be noted that in many manuscripts, it appears as simply 'priest'. So in MS Munich 6; Munich 95; New York 218; New York 1623. However, it is possible that the intention is to the High Priest, as appears in the Oxford manuscript, London, and in the Venice print. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
39. S. Lieberman (ed), *Tosefta Kippurim,* Jerusalem-New York, 1988, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
40. Zuckermandel (ed), *Tosefta Parah*, p. 633. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
41. Although various scholars have pointed out that even Temple rituals described in the past tense are not necessarily a result of eyewitness testimony and their narrative structure, whether in the past tense or in the present participle, does not indicate their antiquity but rather “the shaping of halakhic reality in its 'original' form, as it should have been and as it should be remembered” (Rosen-Zvi, *Rite that was not*, Jerusalem 2008, p. 247 [Hebrew]). See also D. Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen, 2003), pp. 19-28 and following him Rosen-Zvi, [title?] pp. 243-244; Y. Marcus, *From Atonement for the Temple to Atonement for the People - The Temple Ritual in the Day of Atonement in Tannaitic Sources,* Ramat Gan 2022, pp. 307-313 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
42. It should also be noted that almost always the verb “wash” in this context appears in a negative context, when the sources deal with one who did not wash his hands and feet. See mZev. 2:1; ibid. 14:3; mMen. 1:2; mKel. 1:9; mPar. 4:1; tZev. 12:16-17; tKel. (Bava Kamma) 1:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
43. Community Rule Scroll: Column 3, 4 (E. Qimron, above note 000, p. 215). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
44. See above, note 000. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
45. Line 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
46. Thanksgiving Scroll 19:13-14 (ibid., p. 88). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
47. Sifre Numbers 10 (Kahana edition, p. 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
48. Horowitz edition, p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
49. In fact, it is a common assumption in Tannaitic literature that only after sanctification in a vessel does the law of overnight disqualification apply. See mMen. 7:4; Me'il. 2:2. In both Talmuds, a tradition is brought in the name of Ilfa / Halfai, a Palestinian Amora and colleague of Rabbi Yohanan, who believes that according to the Tannaitic opinion (of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar) in tKip. 1:19 (p. 227), just as a priest who is in the Temple all night does not need to sanctify his hands and feet again in the morning as “overnight stay does not invalidate the sanctification of hands and feet”, so the water of the laver itself is not invalidated by overnight stay. See jYom. 2:1, 39c (Academy of the Hebrew Language edition, p. 568); bZev. 19b. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
50. According to MS Vatican 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
51. On interpretations of this type, see A. Shammh, *The Mekhiltot that are Appended to the Sifra: Mekhilta de-Milluim and Mekhilta de-Arayo*t, PhD Diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 122-123 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
52. On the need for two sanctifications and on the tradition of the Mishnah text in the Land of Israel and Babylon, see Marcus, “Restrictions on Entering the Temple,” pp. 75-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
53. Ibid., pp. 70, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
54. See M. Haran, *Bible and Its World*, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 62-69 [Hebrew]; Milgrom, *Leviticus*, pp. 444-445; Propp, *Exodus*, p. 470; S. Friedman, “The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands: The Transformation of a Biblical Concept in Rabbinic Theology.” in Marc Brettler, et al., eds., *Minhah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70th Birthday* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), pp. 124-127; J. Grossman, *Sacrificial Service Gestures of Flesh and Spirit*, Jerusalem 2022, pp. 373-381 [Hebrew]. These studies also noted differences in this matter within the biblical world, in priestly sources, in the book of Ezekiel (44:15-19) and in Haggai (2:11-13). It is worth noting, however, the different approach of Levine, who argues that the plain meaning of the verse is close to the way medieval sages interpreted it. See B.A. Levine, “The Language of Holiness: Perceptions of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible,” in: *Backgrounds for the Bible,* ed. D.N Freedman, Eisenbrauns 1987, pp. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
55. Midrash *Lekach Tov* on the verse in Exod. 29:37; *Ibn Ezra's* commentary on Exod. 29:37; Rashbamand Hizkuni's commentary on these verses (on the possibility that Rashbam was influenced by Midrash *Lekach Tov* in this matter, see J. Jacobs, “To what Degree was Rashbam's Familiar with Midrash Leqah Tov?”, in A. Reiner et al. (eds.) *a Shma : studies in Judaica in memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma Part B*, Alon Shvut 2012 p. 495 [Hebrew]); Commentary of Rabbi Abraham son of Maimonides on this verse (*Commentary on Genesis and Exodus,* London 1958). It is also explained in Tg. Ps-J to Exod. 29:37. As for Tg Onkelos which has “all that approaches the altar shall be sanctified”, see Pozen, *Explanations, Interpretations and Sources for Targum Onkelos - Exodus,* Jerusalem 2004, p. 641 [Hebrew], who argued that Onkelos's translation can be understood in both ways and cannot be decided. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
56. R.D.Z. Hoffmann, *The Book of Leviticus Explained by David Zvi Hoffmann*, Jerusalem 1953, p. 167 [Hebrew]; E. Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion: Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir*, Ramat Gan, 2003, p. 183 [Hebrew]; M. Lockshin, “Why is Holiness Not Contagious?” in A.L. Mittleman (ed.) *Holiness in Jewish Thought*, Oxford, pp. 65-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
57. As expressed in mZev. 9 and parallels. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
58. Milgrom, *Exodus;* Friedman, “The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands,” pp. 129-131; Grossman [could not find this reference]. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
59. The reduction or cancellation of the idea of “contagious holiness” is related to the way holiness was perceived by the Tannaim. Many scholars have noted that in the priestly parts of the Torah, the conception that God dwells physically in the sanctuary is found, and the purpose of the sacrifices is to ensure His dwelling there. This is also how the many prohibitions concerning proximity to the holy were understood, and the commandments on the holiness of man and place in priestly law (see, for example, Y. Kaufmann, *History of Religion of Israel Faith*, Volume Two, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 473-476 [Hebrew]; Knohl [reference needed] pp. 140-145; B. Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation*, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 255-258 [Hebrew]. On the differences within the priestly sources themselves, see J. Milgrom, *Anchor Bible- Leviticus 1-16*, New York 1991, pp. 60-3; Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation,* pp. 11-34 and references there. On the other hand, in Deuteronomy, as Moshe Weinfeld extensively noted (“The Change in the Conception of Religion in Deuteronomy,” *Tarbiz* 1 (1961), pp. 1-17 [Hebrew]), a different conception appears: The book of Deuteronomy reduces the importance of worship in the sanctuary and minimizes its role. Although it emphasizes the centralization of worship, it completely lacks positive commandments involved in the sanctuary such as public sacrifices, daily work in the sanctuary and the attitude towards the sanctuary. According to Weinfeld and other scholars following him (see Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation,* pp. 259-266; Knohl, [citation needed] pp. 159 onwards) in Deuteronomy, holiness is a result of God's choice of His people and the ritual is not needed to preserve it, as emerges from priestly law. Further, God does not dwell in the sanctuary but in heaven (Deut. 26:15) and the center of gravity shifts from the priesthood to the people, who are obliged to keep the covenant by observing the commandments. Holiness in Deuteronomy is a basic assumption while keeping the commandments is its implication. In light of this, the harm to the holy is not central because holiness is not perceived as a tangible matter but as a concept that defines God's choosing of His people. E Regev (ibid., pp. 238-241) suggested defining the difference between priestly law and Deuteronomy by using the concepts of “dynamic holiness” and “static holiness”. According to him, the conception of priestly law is of a dynamic holiness that can be easily harmed and desecrated, and therefore one must make great efforts to protect it. On the other hand, Deuteronomy represents a position according to which holiness is static, fixed and unchanging, in light of God's decision. Therefore, it is also less dangerous and even more available. Holiness in Deuteronomy is a given platform stemming from the covenant between man and God, while in priestly law it is the purpose of all the work. Regev continues and sees this as an expression of two different religious conceptions regarding the relationship between God and man: Priestly law expresses an ontological conception in the relationship between God and man so that human actions have a direct influence on reality and nature. On the other hand, Deuteronomy assumes a deontological conception according to which the relationship between man and God is based mainly on God's command and man's obedience, and human actions do not directly affect spiritual reality. Regev (pp.238-239) continued and argued that it was actually the Sadducees who continued the priestly conception that fears for the vulnerability of the holy, while the Pharisees believed that the holiness of the sanctuary is not in constant danger and it is possible, with the necessary caution, to ease [to ease what?] and involve the people [in what?]. Several studies have shown the traces of the Pharisaic conception in Tannaitic halakhic literature. Y. Marcus (above, note 000) showed that a central Tannaitic conception reduced the command 'and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death', specifically to work in the sanctuary, contrary to the plain meanings of the scriptures, and argued that this stems from the perception of holiness as 'static'. Recently, Y. Mali (“Ritual Leftovers and the Tannaitic Perceptions of Holiness”, *Tarbiz* 88.3 (2022), pp. 339-370) showed that this also emerges from the way the Tannaim related to the remnants of worship. [not clear what “remnants of worship” means] [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
60. Soon to be published in the journal *Sidra* is an article by my friend Y. Mali that deals both with how the idea of contagious holiness was interpreted in the Bible, and with how the command 'whoever touches the altar shall become holy' was interpreted in Tannaitic literature. Mali, like me, noted the difference in terminology between that of Rabbi Yose the Galilean and Rabbi Akiva and that of Rabbi Joshua and Rabban Gamaliel. However, in his opinion, all the Tannaim assumed that the verse 'whoever approaches the altar shall become holy' was interpreted in the sense of an outcome, but they interpreted the idea of contagious holiness in different ways. On the other hand, my claim in this article, and as we will see below, is that there are some of the Tannaim, especially the earlier ones, who understood that in this verse there is a command instructing to sanctify oneself and it does not reflect the idea of contagious holiness in any form. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
61. H. Albeck, The Mishnah - Kodashim, Jerusalem 1956, p. 358. Following him, D. Sabato recently wrote in his dissertation “The Teaching of Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania” – PhD diss., The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 2019, pp. 285-286. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
62. Sifra Tzav, Chapter 1, 2-3, 29a (according to MS Vatican 66). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
63. On the face of it, one should read the opposite, so that specifically according to Rabbi Joshua they shall come down, as appears in the Vatican, New York, London, Oxford, and Parma manuscripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
64. D. Sabato “The Teaching of Rabbi Joshua ben Han”, p. 287, note 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
65. Prof. Vered Noam brought to my attention that the form '*ra'ui*' already appears in the Qumran writings, in the Temple Scroll XV:66 ([need a short citation, or delete the page number if the edition is not crucial] p. 205) “If a man seduces a virgin maiden who is not betrothed and she is fit for him according to the law.” However, the mere use of this form, which also appears in the words of Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua, cannot prove the antiquity of the entire statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
66. In contrast, Friedman actually argued that this source might teach about an early conception of contagious holiness: “The Holy Scriptures Defile the Hands,” pp. 123-124. However, this claim still needs proof in light of the fact that it is not clear from the Mishnah whether touching causes any serious result, which would teach about a conception of 'contagious holiness,' or whether it is just forbidden in itself due to the object being holy. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
67. See above, note 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)