



Parashat Chukat begins with laws relevant to the area of *tum'a* and *tahara* – ritual impurity and purity – including the prohibition against entering the Temple in a state of *tum'a*. The Torah treats this violation with particular severity, establishing *karet* – eternal excision from the Jewish people – as its punishment.

Maimonides, based on the Talmud's discussion in Masekhet Eruvin (104b), rules that one transgresses this prohibition even by placing an object of *tum'a* onto the grounds of the Temple (Hilkhos Bi'at Mikdash 3:16). If a person places the carcass of a *sheretz* – one of the eight rodents that convey ritual impurity (Vayikra 11:29-31) – into the area of the *Mikdash*, then he violates this prohibition even if his entire body remains beyond the boundary of the *Mikdash*. For that matter, if one forcibly places another person who has contracted *tum'a* onto the site of the *Mikdash*, he violates the prohibition against entering the Temple in a state of impurity – even if he himself never steps foot in the sacred territory.

To explain this *halakha*, Maimonides writes, "for he has defiled the Temple of the Lord." This explanation is based upon a phrase that appears twice in Parashat Chukat in reference to the prohibition against entering the Temple grounds in a state of *tum'a*: "*ki et Mishkan Hashem timei*" – "for he has defiled the Sanctuary of the Lord" (19:13,20). As Rav Aharon Lichtenstein explained (<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/sichot/bamidbar/39-62chukat.htm>), the Torah here describes this prohibition in terms of the consequences of the action, rather than the action itself. Entering the Temple in a state of *tum'a* is proscribed not merely because of the wrongful nature of the act itself, but also due to the spiritual "defilement" of the Temple that results from the act. Hence, this prohibition extends to situations where the act itself is not committed, but the effect is nevertheless achieved through some other means. Maimonides thus ruled that if a person brings impurity to the *Mikdash* he has transgressed this violation even if his body never entered the site. As this prohibition relates to the effect of contamination, *Halakha* draws no distinction between walking into the *Mikdash* in a state of impurity and tossing a *sheretz* into the holy site; in both instances, one has caused the spiritual defilement of the Temple.

This prohibition thus reflects the broader notion that the Torah holds us accountable not only for the very actions we perform (or do not perform), but also for their consequences. Even if an act is intrinsically permissible, even if it does not directly "defile the Sanctuary," it is nevertheless forbidden if it can or will result in "defilement."

The clearest expression of this theme is the famous *halakha* of *mesayei'a li-dvar aveira*, abetting sinners in their violation of the Torah, such as handing a cup of wine to a *nazir*. Although the act itself entails no violation, it is forbidden due to the fact that it results in the "defilement" of the world, insofar as it facilitates a forbidden act.

In response to the question, "Which is the path to which a person should adhere?" Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel answered, "*Ha'ro'eh et na-nolad*" – "Foreseeing the result" (Avot 2:9). We are bidden to not only ensure to act properly, but also to act in a manner that will result in greater sanctity and Godliness in the world, and not that will cause, Heaven forbid, the "defilement" of the *Shekhina*.