

face
Hedge

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EDITOR
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To the Editor:

I am grateful for the flattering remarks about my "A Hedge of Roses" by your reviewer, Mrs. Sifra Tendler (Jewish Life, May-June, 1966) -- sufficiently grateful to break the unwritten rule about an author responding to a reviewer.

While I appreciate Mrs. Tendler's gracious comments, I do wish to react to her assertion that the work contains a number of errors of fact. Her charge is authenticated by her in a footnote averring that she consulted competent Halachic authority before offering the criticisms. While no book is perfect, and mine no doubt is flawed in more ways than one, I do not believe that Mrs. Tendler, despite the undisputed credentials of her anonymous authorities, is correct in the specific errors she has purported to discover.

First, the halachic distinction between the prohibition of niddah and the tum'ah of niddah is no doubt valid -- but largely irrelevant to the point I made. The fact remains that the term tum'ah is used to describe the prohibition of niddah even in post-Temple times. Even a cursory glance at the laws of niddah in Yoreh De'ah, beginning with the very first paragraph, will confirm this usage. Furthermore, the question of whether or not the technical law of tum'ah is operative for niddah today is not germane to the psychological problem one encounters in trying to persuade a person to abide by these laws. If the classification is derogatory -- which, of course, it is not -- then the principle remains objectionable regardless of contemporary halachic inapplicability. A legal nicety may appeal to one trained in halachic dialectics; it has little effect on the psychological and philosophical difficulties which we are called upon to deal

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with.

The reviewer's objection to my footnote (p.85) on the difference between "natural" and "artificially accumulated" water is another example of being over-technical. The note begins with the comment, "Interestingly, there is a difference..." Quite obviously, I did not try to "sell" mikvah on this basis. It was just, as stated, an "interesting" observation that distinctions insisted upon by the Halachah are relevant in completely different contexts. Again, the same may be said of Mrs. Tendler's rejection of my translation of metzora as "leper." I am aware of the fact that tzaraath is not leprosy, but I did not write this book for dermatologists; the "ordinary" reader, who has read the Bible in English if at all, considers the metzora as a "leper", and the Talmud relates this disease to death. This was all I was concerned with -- an exposition of Family Purity, not quibbling with the **King James'** translation (whose source was probably the Greek version's rendition of tzaraath as lepra) over medical terminology.

My most important objection is to the reviewer's contention that giluy aroyoth should not be translated as "unchastity," because, she suggests, the halachic term refers exclusively to adultery, i.e. relations with a married Jewess.

This is, of course, a serious error. The term giluy aroyoth, at the very least, comprehends incest, and according to one opinion of Rishonim, even relations between a Jew and an unmarried non-Jewish woman. (See too Sanhedrin 75.) Hence, my use of "unchastity" to cover a variety of prohibited relationships without enumerating a detailed list.

I wish to emphasize that my refutation of certain of Mrs. Tendler's criticisms in no way detracts from my appreciation of her generous recommendation of "A Hedge of Roses."

NORMAN LAMM