**Yadayim, Chapter Three, Mishnah Two**

**Introduction**

This mishnah continues with a dispute between Rabbi Joshua and the sages. As part of their argument they mention the concept that the Holy Scriptures, meaning the Tanakh or Bible, defile the hands. This is a topic that will be discussed throughout the remainder of the chapter. There are two explanations for this halakhah. The traditional explanation is a bit strange and convoluted but it goes like this. People used to store their terumah near the same place that they stored holy scrolls (the Tanakh). Mice would come to eat the terumah and would also eat through the scrolls. To prevent this, the rabbis declared that the scrolls would defile the terumah. This would discourage people from storing terumah near their scrolls. One can clearly sense that this simply does not seem likely to have been the origins of this idea.

Recently, academic scholars have explained that according to some laws in the Torah holiness can "rub off" on an item with which it has contact. This rubbing off on the item works a little bit like impurity, except the terminology is not that the item becomes "impure"—rather it becomes "holy." The rabbis inherited the concept that scrolls of Scripture were so holy that anything they touched would become "holy" as well. Since this was the only such situation that the rabbis encountered, they used the normal term for such "rubbing off" which is impurity. In other words, what really seems to happen is that the hands become holy by virtue of contact with the scrolls. Nevertheless, by the time of the Mishnah these laws are part of the general purity system.

**Mishnah Two**

1. Anything which disqualifies terumah defiles hands with a second degree of uncleanness.
2. One [unwashed] hand defiles the other hand, the words of Rabbi Joshua.
   1. But the sages say: that which has second degree of uncleanness cannot convey second degree of uncleanness.
3. He said to them: But do not the Holy Scriptures which have second degree of uncleanness defile the hands?
   1. They said to him: the laws of the Torah may not be argued from the laws of the scribes, nor may the laws of the scribes be argued from the laws of the Torah, nor may the laws of the scribes be argued from [other] laws of the scribes.

***Explanation***

**Section one**: Anything that has even second degree uncleanness will defile the hands so that they too have second degree uncleanness. This accords with Rabbi Joshua's opinion in yesterday's mishnah. The other rabbis disagree.

**Section two**: An unwashed hand has second degree uncleanness and therefore it disqualifies terumah. According to Rabbi Joshua this means that if one hand is unwashed and it touches a washed hand it will defile it.

The sages reject his opinion, as they did in yesterday's mishnah, holding that something that has second degree impurity cannot convey impurity to anything else. All it can do is disqualify terumah.

**Section three**: Rabbi Joshua uses the concept of the Holy Scriptures defiling the hands as proof for his opinion that anything with second degree uncleanness conveys uncleanness to hands. According to the rabbis, the Tanakh has second degree uncleanness and it defiles the hands. Therefore, everything that has second degree uncleanness should similarly defile the hands.

The other rabbis reject learning from one category of rabbinic law to another. The idea that the Tanakh defiles the hands is a "law of the scribes"—it is of rabbinic origin. Similarly, the halakhah that unwashed hands defile terumah is also of rabbinic origin (see the introduction). One cannot use one halakhah of rabbinic origin to prove another halakhah.