



## Halakhah at Halftime On Pigskin & Spectators

**Pigskin and Gridiron: Notes on the American Football Lexicon** by Matt Kohl, Oxford English Dictionary *Pigskin*...serves as an epithet for the football itself. The *OED* entry notes that footballs are “now usually made from cowhide or other materials.” Popular speculation holds that this nickname evolved because footballs were once fashioned by encasing an inflated pig bladder. It seems more likely, however, that the leather cover sewn around the bladder could itself have been the tanned skin of a pig, thus giving the ball the characteristic name it retains whether the outer covering is now made from cowhide or synthetic material. ([oed.com/public/pigskin](http://oed.com/public/pigskin))

### JEWES AND PIGSKIN

Footballs aren't made of pig skin today, yet the question of Jews and *pigskin* persists. Let's take a deeper look:

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| <p><b>Leviticus 11:7-8</b><br/>And the pig, as it has hooves that are split through but does not chew its cud is impure to you. From its flesh you shall not eat and <b>its carcass you shall not touch</b>, they are impure for you.</p>  | <p><b>ויקרא יא: ז-ח</b><br/>וְאֶת-הַחֲזִיר כִּי-מִפְּרִיס פְּרָסָה הוּא וְשָׁטַע שְׁטַע פְּרָסָה וְהוּא גֵרָה לֹא-יִגֹר טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם. מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ וּבְגִבְתָּם לֹא תִגְעוּ טָמְאִים הֵם לָכֶם.</p>                          |
| <p><b>Ramban, Leviticus 11:8</b><br/><i>And its carcass you shall not touch</i> – it not a warning to prohibit touching, rather it says that you shall not touch its carcass because they are impure to you, meaning you cannot touch them without becoming impure. This is to say that anyone who touches them is impure and should be careful about going to the Temple or touching objects dedicated to it.</p> | <p><b>רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יא פסוק ח</b><br/>ובגבולתם לא תגעו – אינה אזהרה לאסור לנו הנגיעה, אבל יאמר ובגבולתם לא תגעו כי טמאים הם לכם, כלומר לא תגעו בהם בלתי אם תטמאו. והענין, לומר שיחשוב כל נוגע בהם שהוא טמא, ויזהר מן המקדש ומן הקדשים:</p> |

- What does Leviticus have to say about pigs and pig skin?
- How does Ramban understand the text? What are the repercussions of becoming impure? Why is it a non-issue today?
- What are some other assumptions people have about what it means to be Jewish? Where do they originate? How do you feel about them?

### JEWES AS SPORTS SPECTATORS

In the rabbinic text below, the rabbis are concerned about whether or not Jews should attend Roman cultural events such as gladiatorial games and other forms of entertainment. These events would traditionally feature a fight to the death:

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| <p><b>Tosefta Avodah Zarah: 2, 2</b><br/>One who goes to the theaters of the idolaters, if he yells because of necessity, it is permitted, but if he intends to yell, this is forbidden.<br/>One who sits in the amphitheater (of the gladiators) is like a murderer.<br/>Rabbi Natan permits it for two reasons: Because he may shout and save lives, and because he may give testimony enabling a woman to remarry.</p> | <p><b>תוספתא עבודה זרה: ב, ב</b><br/>העולה לתרטיאות של עובדי כוכבים אם צווח מפני צורך מותר ואם מתחשב ה"ז אסור.<br/>היושב באסטרין הרי זה שופך דמים<br/>ר' נתן מתיר משום שני דברים מפני שצוח ומציל את הנפשות ומעיד על האשה שתנשא.</p> |
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- Why did the rabbis want to discourage Jews from attending the theater or gladiatorial games?
- How are modern sports games similar to and different from the events mentioned in this text?
- Rabbi Natan's permission might be read as grudgingly permissive or as an overall endorsement. Which do you think he means? Why?
- In light of the texts on pig skin above, does being Jewish affect one's actions as a sports fan? Why or why not?