

WHY KOSHER?

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and in memory of
Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah ben Zev Hakohen Anemer z"l

Today's Learning:
Nach: Zechariah 7-8
Mishnah: Ohalot 9:5-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 75
Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 568:11-569:1

Much of this week's parashah is devoted to listing or describing animals, birds and fish that may or may not be eaten. R' Yitzchak Arama z"l (Spain and Italy; died 1494) writes: It is necessary for us to know that it is not for health reasons that the Torah prohibited certain foods, contrary to what some scholars have written [a reference to Ramban z"l, among others]. If that were the case, the stature of Torah would be lowered to that of just another medical book. Moreover, if these foods contained physical poisons, they could be counteracted with antidotes or other compounds, as is done with other poisons; in that event, nothing would be left of the Torah's prohibition, and the Torah would be made a mockery. Also, we don't see that the gentiles who eat animals that are prohibited to us live shorter lives than we do.

Rather, R' Arama explains, the reason these animals are prohibited is because they are anathema to the spiritual soul and cause a state of ritual impurity to come upon those who eat them, as our parashah says (verse 43), "Do not make yourselves abominable by means of [eating] any teeming thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them." Our aspiration, rather, is as King David wrote (Tehilim 51:12-13), "Create a tahor / pure heart for me, Elokim, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. . . take not Your Holy Spirit from me." This explanation for the prohibition explains why the Torah uses the words "tahor" and "tamei" to describe foods that may and may not be eaten, respectively. (Akeidat Yitzchak)

"Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them." (9:22)

Rashi z"l comments: "With Birkat Kohanim / the Priestly Blessing: 'Yevarechecha, Ya'air, Yisa'."

R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l (1873-1960; Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim) asks: Why did Rashi feel the need to tell us what Birkat Kohanim is? After all, the Priestly Blessing is specified in the Torah (Bemidbar 6:24-26)!

He answers: The actual text of Birkat Kohanim had not yet been taught at the time of the events in our parashah. Perhaps, suggests R' Frank, Rashi is teaching us that Aharon himself authored the text of Birkat Kohanim at this time. Then, later, Hashem incorporated Aharon's text into the Torah.

This, continues R' Frank, would explain a difficult phrase in the chazzan's recitation of the daily shemoneh esrei: "Bless us with the three-verse blessing in the Torah . . . that was said by Aharon and his sons, the Kohanim." Why is it not enough to refer to "the three-verse blessing in the Torah"? Why do we mention that the blessing was said by Aharon? If, however, Aharon himself authored the blessing, it is understandable that we invoke his merit when asking Hashem to bless us. (Har Zvi Al Ha'Torah)

"This may you eat from everything that is in the water - everything that has fins and scales in the water, in the seas, and in the streams, those may you eat." (11:9)

The Gemara (Niddah 51b) teaches: "Every fish that has scales also has fins. Why then did the Torah mention fins, not just scales? To enhance the Torah and make it greater."

The usual interpretation of the Gemara's answer is that the Torah stated something that did not need to be stated (that is, that kosher fish have fins) in order to give us reward for studying that additional law. However, writes R' Moshe Leib Shachor z"l (Yerushalayim; 1894-1964), there is another possible interpretation of the Gemara, one which resolves another issue as well.

He explains: Sixteenth century Torah scholars struggled to reconcile the Gemara's statement that every fish that has scales has fins with the discovery of a fish that has scales but no fins. Perhaps, writes R' Shachor, the correct interpretation of the Gemara is as follows: As far as we know today (in the time of the Gemara), every fish that has scales has fins. Why then did the Torah mention fins, not just scales? To enhance the Torah and make it greater, i.e., to show that the Torah is of Divine authorship and its Author knows that it is not true that every fish that has scales has fins; therefore it was necessary to say that a fish is kosher only if it has both signs. (Avnei Shoham)

Pirkei Avot

"Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua." (1:1)

R' Yitzchak Berachiah Mi'Fano z"l (Italy; 1583-1658) comments: The mishnah is teaching that Moshe transmitted to Yehoshua everything that he could possibly transmit. While there certainly is a qualitative difference between learning from Hashem, as Moshe did, and learning from Moshe, as Yehoshua did, nevertheless our mishnah speaks in praise of Moshe that he "gave generously." (Chanoch La'naar)

R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l (1910-2012) writes: Many individuals in that generation could have merited what Yehoshua merited, for it was the result of his never leaving Moshe's side. The Torah relates (Shmot 33:11), "His servant, Yehoshua son of Nun, a lad, would not depart from within the tent," indicating that Yehoshua fulfilled the dictum of our Sages (Shabbat 83b), "A person should never refrain from being in the bet midrash even for a short while." Before Moshe died, he asked Yehoshua, "Do you have uncertainty about anything I taught you?" Yehoshua replied, "My teacher! Did I ever leave you to go somewhere else?" Yehoshua always viewed himself as a "lad" who had not yet advanced in Torah learning, and that is why he merited the level he merited.

R' Elyashiv continues: The Gemara (Bava Batra 75a) relates that the elders of that generation exclaimed, "The face of Moshe was like the face of the sun, while the face of Yehoshua is like the face of the moon. Woe for that shame! Woe for that humiliation!" The moon gives off no light of its own; rather, it reflects the sun's light. When the elders saw that Yehoshua was able to reflect Moshe's light, they were ashamed at not having done the same thing that he had.

Why hadn't they? Because the elders reasoned that they would be together with Moshe for many years; there will always be time later to hear his lessons. In this way, writes R' Elyashiv, they threw away many hours of their best years.

We read (Tehilim 119:162), "I rejoice over Your word like one who finds a great treasure." R' Elyashiv quotes R' Akiva Eiger z"l (1761-1837) as explaining: If one finds on the road a treasure that is too big for him to carry home, he will rejoice over the riches he is able to collect, on the one hand, but he will always feel regret and loss for the part of the treasure that he has to leave behind. That is the attitude one must have toward Torah learning as well: to rejoice at the opportunity to learn, but to know that there is so much more that one is not learning. This, concludes R' Elyashiv, is why a Torah scholar is referred to as a "talmid chacham" / "wise student," for he never views himself as one who finished learning. (Kitvei Ha'Grish)

Shemittah

This week we discuss the prohibition of "sefichin." The halachot below are from chapter six of Sefer Ha'shemittah by R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l (1872-1955; Yerushalayim) and from Ha'aretz U'mitzvotah by R' Avraham Hillel Goldberg z"l (Kfar Pines, Israel).

The term "sefichin" refers to any produce that grew on its own, either from seeds that were inadvertently dropped during the sixth year (i.e., the year preceding shemittah) or from roots or stumps that were left in the ground after the harvest of the sixth year. According to Torah law (Vayikra 25:6), such produce may be picked and eaten in the seventh year. However, the Sages prohibited picking or eating sefichin because of dishonest individuals who would plant in secret during the shemittah year and then claim that their produce had grown on its own (i.e., was "sefichin") and was permitted.

Because the decree against eating sefichin was made in order to counteract cheating, it does not apply in situations where cheating is either unlikely or impossible. Specifically, the prohibition is not applicable to the following:

- Types of produce that are not commonly planted (including edible weeds);
- Produce that grew in fields that are not suitable for cultivation;
- All fruits that grow on trees (because a tree does not give fruit in the year it was planted);
- Vegetables and flowers which in fact grew in the sixth year, even if they were picked in the seventh year;
- Grain that was planted in the sixth year after the regular season ended;
- Grains and legumes that reached one-third of their adult growth before the shemittah;
- Produce of a gentile; and
- Flowers of varieties that are not usually raised commercially.

Sefichin that grow in the seventh year remain prohibited after the shemittah. One may plow over them (to prepare the field for the eighth year) and one need not stop his animals from eating them. Sefichin that remain in/on the ground until the harvest of the eighth year begins are permitted.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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