A STORY STRESSING THE REWARD FOR METICULOUS KASHRUS OBSERVANCE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemini

A Story Stressing The Reward For Meticulous Kashrus Observance

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes: Tape #808 - New York City - Don't Drink the Water? Good Shabbos!

The pasuk at the conclusion of the section of forbidden foods listed at the end of the parsha says: "For I am Hashem Who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; you shall be holy for I am holy." [Vayikra 11:45] Rashi cites the teaching of the House of Rav Yishmael that the pasuk means to say, had I not brought Israel out of Egypt for any reason other than that they do not make themselves impure through eating of the forbidden foods as do the other nations, it would have been sufficient cause for them to have been redeemed.

It is difficult to OVERSTATE the importance of the laws of Kashrus. It is likewise difficult to UNDERSTATE the great harm done to a Jewish soul by the consumption of forbidden foods. I once heard Rabbi Berel Wein quote a statistic published by the Jewish National Fund that today 80% of their money comes from only 10% of the Jewish population. Despite the fact that Jews have a reputation for being generous, that may have been the case 40, 50, 60, or 80 years ago. Today, the eating of pig, shellfish, crab, and improperly slaughtered meat that the Jewish people have been consuming over the past 50 years has taken a toll on the Jewish soul. The "Yiddishe neshama" is not what it used to be because of the corrosive effect of forbidden food entities.

That having been said, I read the following story that was written by Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, a disciple of the Kesav Sofer. The Kesav Sofer, in turn, was the son of the Chasam Sofer who told this story in the name of his teacher, Rav Nosson Adler. The story took place in the late 1700s or the early 1800s.

There were two successful Jewish merchants who lived in Pressburg, the city of the Chasam Sofer. They had their own fleet of boats in which they used to travel the world in pursuit of their import/export business. These merchants were once arrested by Spanish authorities off the coast of

Spain with their ship full of merchandise. At that particular point in time, piracy was rampant in the Mediterranean Sea and therefore smuggling and piracy was common. The Jews and their merchandise were detained because of the (false) suspicion that their goods were pirated or smuggled.

They were brought into the port of Barcelona to be held in custody while the investigation proceeded as to whether their cargo was legitimate. They were lucky, however, in that at that time, the Spanish Government had very good relations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its Emperor, Franz-Yosef. Based on the good diplomatic relations, the Jews were not thrown into jail. They were treated very respectfully while they were being detained. They were assigned to two customs officials, who would take care of them while the investigation proceeded. Each was taken home by one of the customs officials to relax and be served lunch.

There was only one problem. Despite the fact that this story took place between two and three hundred years after the Inquisition, the Inquisition was still alive and well in Spain. Under terms of the Inquisition, any person in Spain suspected of being Jewish was given the choice of either converting to Catholicism or being burned in the town square. The merchants realized that if their Jewish identities would be revealed, they would face this horrible choice.

Therefore, the Jews disguised themselves so that they would look like Gentiles. As mentioned before, each merchant was assigned to a different customs agent. The customs agent had his servant serve them lunch - consisting of chicken and wine. The customs agent noticed that his guest turned white as a ghost. He then told his guest to follow him to the attic. When they got to the attic he told him, "I know that something is wrong. You turned white as a ghost when my servant brought you your food. You are Jewish, aren't you?" Before the guest had a chance to answer, the customs agent told him, "So am I." It just so happened that this customs agent was a descendant of the Marranos, who outwardly converted to avoid expulsion from Spain, but secretly tried to maintain their Jewish identity and Jewish traditions. To prove his point, he closed the door of the attic, pulled up a floor board and took out a shiny and sharp knife used in ritual slaughter ('chalif'). He told his guest, "The chicken we are about to eat, I personally slaughtered it!" Kosher L'Mehadrin!

The Jewish merchant was flabbergasted at the personal Divine Providence (Hashgocha Pratis) that sent him specifically to this man's house! He ate his meal, the investigation concluded that there was no problem with their merchandise, and both merchants were released. The Jew met up with his partner and asked him about his experiences. The second Jew was very distraught. He admitted that he had to eat non Kosher meat to preserve his appearance as a non-Jew. He had ruled for himself that this was a matter of life and death and in such situations one is not required to be a martyr to eat only kosher food. The first Jew told his friend, "The same thing happened to me, but I had the unbelievable fortune of being hosted by a secret Jew who was a Shochet, and I was able to eat kosher."

The man who had to eat the non-Kosher meat was beside himself when he heard this story. "What was my sin, what was my iniquity that caused G-d to lead my partner to a secret observant Jew and I was forced to eat nevilah?" When he got back to Pressburg, he went to his holy Rebbi, the Chasam Sofer and told him the story. "What", he asked his teacher, "did I do wrong in my life that I was put into a situation that I had to eat non-Kosher?"

The Chasam Sofer responded, "I have a tradition from my teacher, the holy Gaon Rav Nosson Adler, that any person who never put anything in his mouth that had the slightest question of being forbidden, the Almighty guarantees that this person will never come into a situation which would force him to eat something that is prohibited. If you are so careful that you never ever put anything questionable into your mouth the 'measure for measure' reward is that the Almighty will see to it that you in fact never have to eat anything prohibited."

The Chasam Sofer concluded, "It must be that some time in your past, you must have eaten something forbidden or something about which there was at least a doubt that it might be forbidden." The merchant responded, "Rebbi, it cannot be. It is not true!" The Chasam Sofer insisted: "Think hard." Finally, the merchant admitted: "There was one incident. When I was first married, my wife made chicken for us. She brought me the chicken after she got it from the slaughterer and showed me a 'shaylah' [question] she had about the chicken. I was a young newlywed. I was ashamed to tell my wife that I did not know and she should ask the Rabbi. I did have Semicha. I learned the laws of Shechita and of Tereifos. I looked at the chicken. I saw the shaylah. I said 'kosher.'"

Being a newlywed, his wife did not trust him. She took the chicken to a Rav. She told the Rav, "My husband has Semicha, he learned the laws of Tereifa, and he says the chicken is Kosher. Is he right about that?" The Rav looked at the chicken and it was not such a simple question, but he did not want to second guess the newlywed husband so he said, "Okay, your husband says it is kosher, you can rely on his opinion." The merchant told the Chasam Sofer, "I ate that chicken."

The Chasam Sofer exclaimed, "That is it! You put in your mouth something that had a possibility of being prohibited. That is why you forfeited the guarantee mentioned by Rav Noson Adler. The other merchant must have never put anything with a doubt of prohibition in his mouth. He had the guarantee from the Almighty that he would be protected from ever eating non-kosher food."

I tell this story in the context of the entire shiur we said earlier this evening (regarding the question of "bugs" in the water supply in New York City). It is not for us to decide whether the water is Kosher or Treife. There are already great poskim who have expressed their opinions on the matter. But this is just an example of how careful we must be regarding putting something non-kosher into our mouths. Meticulous care in this matter yields fulfillment of the promise of the Almighty that we will never come to put something forbidden into our mouths.

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This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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