



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Shmini

HAMELECH

Food for the Soul

In this week's *parashah*, when the Torah exhorts us not to eat rodents and the like, it states [11:43], "*Ve'lo titamu ba'hem ve'netmeitem bam*, Do not contaminate yourselves with them and become contaminated by them." There appears to be a redundancy in the *pasuk*, for once the Torah has warned us not to contaminate ourselves by eating the forbidden creatures, it seems extraneous to write that we will "be contaminated by them."

In the following *pasuk* [ibid. 44] the Torah states the reason for this prohibition, "*Ki Ani Hashem Elokeichem ... ki kadosh Ani ve'lo titamu et nafshoteichem*, For I am Hashem your G-d ... for I am holy, and do not contaminate your souls." Is the Creator's holiness a reason to obligate man, dust from the earth, to also be holy and refrain from contaminating himself?

Eat Smart

Many fine, upstanding individuals mistakenly believe that eating non-kosher food is simply forbidden and nothing more. Therefore they relate to questions in *kashrut* in a casual manner, as if it were not an absolute requirement, but, rather, a matter of extreme piety and beyond the letter of the law. This leads them to act leniently regarding *kashrut*. However, the Torah teaches us

that these people are making a big mistake. This is so, because besides for the actual prohibition involved in eating forbidden food, such food also irreparably damages man's soul and intellect. Therefore, his desire to perform the mitzvot of the Torah is weakened tremendously if he eats them. Resultantly, to the extent that an individual raises his standard of *Kashrut*, his intellect is purified and his soul is sanctified. If there was a food that was suspected of being poison and harmful to the body, man would flee from it as if he were fleeing from fire. How much more so should an individual take care not to harm his soul, by permanently sully it with non-kosher foods [see the *Zohar* on *Parashat Shmini* pg. 35b].

Just How Bad Is It

Our Sages [Yoma 39a] ask why the aforementioned *pasuk*, when describing the harmful effects of forbidden food states, "*ve'netmeitem bam*, and become contaminated by them," and spells *ve'netmeitem* without an *alef* [ונטמתם]. Our Sages explain that this hints to the fact that eating forbidden foods causes a barrier of spiritual impurity to be placed on the heart, and it renders the heart unable to absorb Torah wisdom. The *Sefer Hachinuch* [mitzvah 362] explains that spiritual contamination weakens the power of the intellect, as our Sages



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have stated above, and causes the wellsprings of the intellect to be sealed off by spiritual impurity. According to this, we can answer the question we posed above, why the *pasuk* repeats the phrase, "Do not contaminate yourselves with them and become contaminated by them." The *pasuk* is referring to two different things: The first part of the phrase refers to the spiritual impurity that man absorbs by eating forbidden foods. The second part of the phrase [ונטמתם] refers to the fact that man's mind becomes sealed off from Torah knowledge as a result of eating the food. This also enables us to answer the second question: The *pasuk* stated "*ve'lo titamu et nafshoteichem*, and do not contaminate your souls," which implies that besides for contamination of the body, there is also contamination of the spiritual soul, a "portion of Hashem Above" [Iyov 31:2]. Therefore the Torah is teaching us that just as Hashem is holy, so too, we should take care not to contaminate the soul which is a *portion* of Hashem, as it were.

Poison! Beware!

Ramchal compares "issur" to "eress" – poison. He points out that no one in their right mind would bite into a food item if there were some doubt of it having been poisoned. We should act no differently regarding possible issur mixed into our food.

Zohar HaKadosh says: One who partakes of forbidden food becomes stuck to the "other side"; he makes himself detestable, an impure spirit resides upon him. He displays that he has no portion in the Supreme Almighty. When he leaves this world, impure forces grab ahold of him and contaminate him and judge him as a person who is detestable to his Master. He is detestable in this world and in the world to come. Woe upon their souls! They will not cling to the Bond of Everlasting Life.

Elisha ben Abuya

Just how serious eating, and even **smelling**, forbidden foods is can be learned from the Yerushalmi [Chagigah 2:1]. When the mother of Elisha ben Abuya was expecting, she passed by an idolatrous sacrificial offering. She smelled it and ate it. She was actually permitted to do so, as our Sages teach [Yoma 82] that if a pregnant woman smells food and is enticed by it, she is fed the food even on Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, the non-kosher animal simmered inside of her like a serpent. Elisha was eventually born and grew to become very great in Torah, and was even the teacher of Rabbi Meir. Nevertheless the venom imbibed from eating the forbidden food remained inside of Elisha and was instrumental in causing him to sin until he became "*Acher*."



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Additionally the *Pri Chadash* [*Yoreh De'ah siman 81, s"k 26*] writes that even though if a young child is eating *neveilot* it is not required to prevent him from doing so, that is only according to the strict letter of the law. Nevertheless, he states, you *should* prevent him, because the non-kosher food will harm him in his old age. It will cause him to have a wicked nature, and he will eventually stray from the Torah path. He then writes **"And since in our generation, individuals are not careful about these matters, most of the children stray from Torah and mitzvot. Most of them are brazen and lacking in Heavenly fear, and even if you rebuke them, they will not accept words of mussar."**

A Strange Question

Rav Chaim of Brisk *zt"l* relates an amazing story that occurred in the time of the Rambam. When the Rambam was in Yemen, he became acquainted with one of the Torah giants of the time. When the Rambam returned home, this Rav would continuously send him questions and answers on Torah topics. The Rambam once received a letter from the Rav which contained a very deep philosophical question. The Rambam read the question and was astounded. Holding his head, he remarked that he could not believe that such a question in faith could ever occur to a

Jew, and that it was only possible if the one posing the question possessed an impure soul. He therefore refrained from answering the question. Over the next number of months, the man continued to send several more letters. The Rambam felt impelled to answer and, therefore, responded, writing only, "Go and examine the *shochtim* and *bodkim* of your congregation." Upon receiving the letter, the Rav followed the Rambam's instruction. He subsequently discovered that for the last 13 years the *shochtim* had been feeding both him and the entire city *neveilot* and *treifot*. This had contaminated his soul to the extent that even a Torah genius like himself had come to pose heretical questions.

Just a Few Grapes

Another amazing incident is recorded in the book, *Yerushalayim shel Ma'alalah*. In the old city of Jerusalem lived an elderly woman known as "Bubby Elka". One time, on the first day of Selichot, the Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Dan Ralbag was on his way to the Beit HaKnesset in the wee hours of the morning. He passed by Bubby Elka's home and heard her weeping bitterly. Rabbi Ralbag was determined to find out what pained her in particular. He discovered that one of her grandsons, who had previously been



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very successful in his learning, had begun to show signs of weakness in understanding the Gemara.

Rabbi Ralbag approached the staff of the institution where the boy studied. He found out who was his rebbi and exchanged a few words with him. Indeed, the rebbi was astounded. He could not understand how this star pupil suddenly seemed to be incapable of comprehending the Gemara.

Rabbi Ralbag proceeded to go to the boy's house and discuss the matter directly with the student. He found a young, sincere boy who himself could not fathom why Gemara had become so foreign to him. The boy cried as he told his story.

Rabbi Ralbag asked him to review his day and try to discover any possible reason for this development. The boy thought and thought. Then he remembered how new neighbors had come and he had begun playing with their children. One day, the new boy's father offered him some grapes which his brother had sent him from his vineyard in Petach Tikva. Rabbi Ralbag sniffed something suspicious here and after inspection, discovered that ma'aser had not been taken. This boy had eaten 'tevel', no wonder he could not understand the Gemara!

Rabbi Ralbag advised the parents to take upon themselves to remind all local grocers to tithe their produce. This would be a proper teshuvah,

in addition to the general guidelines of teshuvah. Rabbi Ralbag then returned to Bubby Elka and assured her that the matter had been rectified and b'ezrat Hashem, she will soon see nachat from this grandson again.

This is as the Pri Chadash writes (Yoreh Deia 81:26) that forbidden food eaten by a child contaminates his soul and the results of this sometimes only become apparent years later! This is a major cause of Jews who were raised in religious homes and abandon Yiddishkeit and act arrogantly. They lose all traces of Yirat Shamayim and refuse to accept rebuke.

Architectural Elusion

Here is another one.

An expert architect, well into his eighties, came to Rav Chaim Kanievsky and asked him why he had such difficulty understanding a Daf Gemara. Here he was, an expert mathematician, even in his seniority he still could make all the necessary calculations and considerations to sketch blueprints for skyscrapers. Nonetheless, when he would sit down and open a Gemara, none of it made any sense to him. He had children and grandchildren learning, but he could not comprehend a word.

As he stood there, he said to Rav Chaim, "Just now, I remembered that when I was nine years old, I had a non-Jewish neighbor who was eating



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non-kosher food. He offered me some and I ate it! From then on, I did not understand what the Rebbe in Cheider was saying as he explained the Gemara! What can I do to fix that?"

Rav Chaim advised him to fast for an entire day. The man said that at his age, even Yom Kippur was quite difficult. Rav Chaim told him to give it a try.

Cheesecake

There was an *avreich*, a *kollel* fellow, who used to study Torah with a *bachur*, a young man, each day to help him in his studies. They were learning wonderfully, but, one day, the *bachur* suddenly did not understand the gemara they were learning, and as much as he tried, he was unsuccessful. So the *avreich* said to him, "Let's go to Rav Chaim Kanievsky to receive his advice and *bracha*." When Rav Chaim was asked about the *bachur's* difficulty, he looked at the *bachur*, and told him to be careful about eating forbidden foods, because he sees the image of an undomesticated animal on the boy's forehead. The boy was broken and admitted to the *avreich* that when he had come to his home to learn with him, the *avreich's* wife had baked a dairy cake which smelled delicious and enticed the *bachur*. She served a slice to her husband and then asked the *bachur* if he had eaten meat in the last six hours. Even though he had, he nevertheless

responded "no," because he craved the cake. Unable to withstand the temptation, he ate the dairy despite the fact that he had previously eaten meat. This situation repeated itself several times, and he was therefore now unable to understand the gemara. He undertook to repent for what he did, and the situation improved.

Kashrut in the Home

We have learned from all that was stated above just how much success in one's Torah learning and Heavenly fear, as well as the *chinuch* of his children is all dependent on the degree that he is stringent in his standards of *kashrut*. This is one of the pillars of a Jewish home. It is not to be taken lightly. A person should not simply rely on every available *hechsher*, because the matter will affect his soul as well as the souls of his offspring. Therefore *Maran HaChida* in *Birkei Yosef* [*Orach Chaim* 157:1:1] quotes Rav Yaakov Tzemach who writes that an individual should exert himself to have the proper *kavanot*, intentions while eating, and that he should not eat like an animal. He writes that the Heaven fearing man will always consider what our Sages state [and *Tosafot* cites in *Ketubot* 104] that "Until a person prays that Torah should enter his body, let him pray that delicacies not enter into his body."

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka