

Torah Observant "SHOMER MITZVOT"

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
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WHAT IS FOOD?

A Look at the Dietary Laws of the Torah

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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1. Introduction

An oft-misunderstood subject today is the dietary laws of the Torah. What exactly is the Bible talking about when we hear the term "kosher"? In this article, I want to examine the biblical definitions of this concept, its use during the time period of both the TaNaKH and the B'rit Chadashah (New Covenant), as well as its practical application for us today. This subject will take us into an explanation of hermeneutics, halakhah, and finally, a biblical understanding of what is kosher. Some of the texts that we will examine in this study include Leviticus Chapter 11; Deuteronomy 17:8-13; Mark 7:1-23; and Acts Chapter 10. In reality, we are going to attempt to define, from the Torah, "What is food?" and "What is not food?" and "Why?"

Before we can embark on a biblical understanding of this subject, we need to establish some basic hermeneutic principles. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, especially the branch of theology that deals with the principles of Scriptural interpretation. Properly understood: hermeneutic principles govern proper biblical interpretation. These principles establish the guidelines that are employed by laymen as well as scholars. Why is it so important to establish these principles? If we did not practice these established guidelines, the text would be left to the subjectivity of each individual interpreter, and serious Scriptural injury would be the result. Because well-meaning interpreters come from a variety of cultural, educational and spiritual backgrounds, we can be sure that each one is going to approach any given text with a certain amount of personal bias. Such established principles are therefore needed and should be followed.

One of the most important of these principles involves the preservation of biblical continuity. If the Torah establishes a truth in one passage, then the same truth is recognized as valid in all subsequent passages, even if it appears to be contradicting itself. As the complete, unified, Word of God, we will do well to recognize that the Scripture cannot contradict itself in any given set of passages. More specifically, if it can be shown that the Torah (the foundational part of the Old Testament) establishes the guidelines for the definition of food, then it stands to reason, therefore, that these same guidelines govern the New Testament's definition of food as well.

The word "kosher" כֹּשֶׁר stems from the Hebrew root word "kasher" כָּשַׁר which means, "to be straight, or right"; by implication, it means, "to be acceptable."¹ Today, in Modern Hebrew, this word is naturally associated with the dietary requirements, specifically as it is related to food. To "kasher" something is to render it "kosher." But what does the Torah mean by "acceptable" or "non-acceptable?" Let's establish some foundational truths before we examine what is kosher.

In a dialogue that establishes the basis of "separation," that is "holiness as expressed through set-apart-ness," HaShem explains to Moshe:

"Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya'akov, to tell the people of Isra'el; You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart." (Exodus 19:3-6, emphasis mine)

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), כָּשַׁר.

The idea of being set apart for the purpose of serving the One, True, Living God was to be a central concept in the lives and purposes of the budding Nation of Isra'el. To be sure, in this manner, HaShem would showcase his uniqueness to the surrounding nations, through the unique lifestyle of his Chosen People.

Isra'el was not chosen for her size, power, or spiritual aptitude. To be sure, she was usually lacking in one or more of these areas. No, she was chosen to be a "fishbowl" nation, placed in a key, geographical location, for the entire world to examine. From this position, HaShem would unfold his wonderful plan of redemption and blessing to the entire earth. With this principle established, we are ready to move on to one of the primary passages in the Torah Proper (first five books), which addresses this subject of "set apart."

2. What is Food? – Part One

In Leviticus chapter 11, the entire chapter is given over to explaining what types of animals are acceptable for consumption, and which one were forbidden to consume as food. In this chapter, the language used, as is typical of most of the subjects dealt with in Leviticus, is "clean" and "unclean." These concepts don't really translate into the English vernacular too well without compromising some of the rich meaning conveyed in the original Hebrew. For instance, in Leviticus 11:4-8, speaking of some earth-dwelling animals, we read these words:

“But you are not to eat those that only chew the cud or only have a separate hoof. For example, the camel, the coney and the hare are unclean for you, because they chew the cud but don't have a separate hoof; while the pig is unclean for you, because, although it has a separate and completely divided hoof, it doesn't chew the cud. You are not to eat meat from these or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.”

In every single instance, the original Hebrew word translated as "unclean" above is "tamei" טָמֵא (say "tah-may"). As already expressed, this word is rather difficult to render precisely into a receptor language. The concept implied here can mean a wide variety of ideas, ranging from ritually "unclean" to physically "unclean" to spiritually "unclean" to ethically "unclean."² Related to tamei is the synonym "shekets" שֶׁקֶט, a word normally associated with birds, water-dwellers, and swarming creatures (fish, insects, etc.), usually rendered "disgusting, detestable, or abominable," defined by the BDB as "detestable thing or idol, an unclean thing, an abomination, detestation."³ Which meaning is in view here? Ritually unclean/detestable? Physically unclean/detestable? In keeping to the rules of biblical interpretation, we shall make a safe assumption that the physical is likely and firstly in question here, since the text explains that merely coming in

² Ibid., טָמֵא.

³ Ibid., שֶׁקֶט.

"contact" with the carcass renders a person "tamei." To be sure, among the rabbinical attempts at interpreting Scripture, p'shat (plain, literal), remez (hint), drash (search), and sod (hidden), physical uncleanness would be the p'shat. I would have to agree that intrinsic and ritual uncleanness is additionally and clearly being taught in Leviticus also. What is more, to describe an object and label it in terms of tamei/shekets is to compare such an object to the Holy Sanctum or to the community at large: the object is unclean unto (or in relation to) the Holy Sanctum and/or unclean (or in relation to) your fellow Isra'elite. Such items are not generally thought of as tamei/shekets in a vacuum. On what biblically to do if a person contracts uncleanness see the section at the end of my commentary entitled "**Penalties/Remedies.**" At this point in our study, let us go back and establish the context of the entire passage.

The immediate context suggests that these instructions were given to Moshe and his priestly brother Aharon, to be expressly conveyed to the People of Isra'el as they interacted with a Holy God at the designated meeting places that HaShem commanded, viz, the Tabernacle (later the Temple). This is our immediate context, and therefore serves to establish the basis of our definition of applicability. Surely these laws and rulings are meant for the people to whom they are addressed, as they would find themselves wishing to approach HaShem. But are they meant for the rest of the nations as well? Would these same gracious instructions find validity and application for the surrounding, godless people groups that Isra'el would find herself dwelling among, also? Could a non-Isra'elite approach HaShem without fear of contaminating his Holy Sanctum? Or does one Law apply for both the native-born as well as the stranger? We shall answer those questions shortly, but first, let's return to our text in Leviticus:

"For I am ADONAI your God; therefore, consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy; and do not defile yourselves with any kind of swarming creature that moves along the ground. For I am ADONAI, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore you are to be holy, because I am holy." (11:44-45)

Once again, we find this "signature" of HaShem's deliverance: **"For I am ADONAI, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God."** This is the exact same concept used in the verse at the onset of our study! Among Isra'el, HaShem was to be remembered as the God who delivered you. As such, your lifestyle was to reflect his absolute uniqueness among the other "gods" worshipped in the world, then and now. This is covenant language reserved for those in covenant agreement with HaShem. This answers one of the questions posed above as to whether or not a non-Isra'elite could approach God without fear of contaminating his Holy Sanctum. The answer is obvious: why would a non-Isra'elite wish to approach a God with whom he was not in covenant with to begin with? I don't see HaShem relating to people during this period outside of covenant. Reaching out to non-covenant members? Yes.

Allowing just any old desert wanderer to approach the Holy Sanctum unconcerned with what was written in the Torah? I don't think so. How was this concept of ritual exclusivity understood with regards to the way that his recognized covenant people were to eat? Let's let the Torah speak for itself:

"Such then, is the law concerning animals, flying creatures, all living creatures that move about in the water, and all creatures that swarm on the ground. Its purpose is to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten." (11:46-47)

Here in the pages of our text, we find in no uncertain terms, the definition of what is "food" and what is "not food." We also find the counterpart to our peculiar word "tamei." It is the Hebrew word "tahor" טָהוֹר, translated as "clean." Going back to our hermeneutic principle of context, these concepts of "tamei" and "tahor," as outlined in Leviticus chapter 11, fall right in the middle of a series of chapters dealing with such subjects as the consecration of Aharon and his sons as high priests (chapter 8), the details concerning sin offerings and sacrifices (chapter 9), the consequences of failing to establish a difference between the holy and the unholy (chapter 10), and the beginnings of the rulings concerning "unclean flesh," known as leprosy (chapter 12). It is within this context that HaShem explains "what is kosher" and what is "not kosher," and consequently, what is "food" and what is "not food." Is God the God of the Gentiles? Surely he is. It stand to reason, therefore, that the paradigm was being set in the TaNaKH that there be one Law for both the native born as well as the stranger in matters pertaining to covenant privileges. One standard was to be established and agreed upon for all Isra'el, a standard she would be held accountable for to eventually share with the surrounding nation groups as well (read Deut. 4: 1-14). Since all men share the same Creator, we can, therefore, conclude that these distinctions of holy and unholy are applicable for the surrounding nations, as well as for Isra'el. Our God is exclusive. Our God is consistent.

3. Oral Tradition? – Part One

Although the Torah is amazingly clear in this passage as to what is food and what is not, in many instances, a lack of clear understanding still existed among interpreters of the written text as a whole. To be sure, because of the differences of opinions, an elaborate system of **Oral Tradition** was established to "humanize the Word of God." It was believed that there existed necessary "gaps" in the exact instructions given in the written Word. It was also necessary, the rabbis supposed, to "fill in what God left out." From whence did the rabbis derive this authority? Why, supposedly from the written text itself. I want to take a small amount of time out to briefly discuss the problem with the "**Oral Torah**." This discussion will become important later when we look at a key New Covenant passage in Mark, involving a contradiction between the Oral Tradition of Yeshua's day and the Written text, as it was related to food.

Chapter 17 of Deuteronomy talks about the details surrounding official and legal matters. Of particular interest is the subject dealt with in verses 8-13. To be sure, the sages of old understood this to be talking about the matter of *halakhah* and the authority of what is known in rabbinical circles as “**Oral Torah.**” From a cursory reading, it appears to be a valid teaching about establishing a governing body of legal authority based on the spoken opinion of the ‘judge’ of the day. This is where the *halakhah* gains its strength and application. This term is roughly translated “the way in which to walk.” The rabbis see in this passage an opportunity to establish the tradition of the **Oral Torah.** As they see it, this passage instructs its readers “**In accordance with the Torah they teach you, you are to carry out the judgment they render, not turning aside to the right or the left from the verdict they declare to you**” (v.11). Taking the verse in its most natural and literal sense, it does seem to validate the right for the rabbis to impose their judgments on all succeeding generations. And to strengthen the suggested interpretation, a first century Rabbi by the name of **Yeshua** had this to say to his crowd, “**The Torah-teachers and the P’rushim,**” he said, “**sit in the seat of Moshe. So whatever they tell you, take care to do it. But don’t do what they do, because they talk but don’t act!**” What Yeshua is addressing here is the issue of hypocrisy when it comes to correctly interpreting the Torah, yet failing to implement it into our lives. But our LORD does not condone the Oral Tradition as binding, that is, on par with Torah. However, any tradition, when not in direct conflict with Scripture, is harmless I’m sure.

As can be shown, a careful distinction needs to be made by the Jewish believer in Messiah, regarding matters of rabbinical authority (Oral Torah) and Torah issues as a whole. If our Messiah correctly determines correct Torah interpretation, then a misrepresentation of the true nature and intent of the Torah, whether by the sages of the Jewish People, or by the non-Jewish scholars of today, needs to be avoided at all costs.

4. Oral Tradition? – Part Two

In an effort to gain as complete a view of this topic as possible, let us turn our attention to a secondary passage dealing with Scriptural interpretation, particularly one in which the historic rabbis render a “food” verdict that I personally choose to disagree with on a universal application level.

In **Parashat Mishpatim**, dealing with Exodus 23:10-24 I made these comments:

Chapter 23 – Verses 10-24 form one complete unit of instructions that center on provision and blessing during the “resting years” that the Land is to experience. HaShem tells the people to grant unto the land a time period of rest (shabbat) so that the soil can replenish itself and provide a healthy crop on the eighth year after its rest. Consequently, during this time of supernatural provision, HaShem knew that some people would be

inclined to doubt the providence of his Mighty Hand, and would be tempted to imitate the pagan society around them. The entire section is given over to HaShem assuring them of his provision and blessing despite the fact that no crops will be sown for an entire year! It has been discovered that some of the pagan practices involved worship of the elements of the earth. This worship took the form of offering sacrifices to the gods of the sun, earth, wind, sky, rain, and consequently, the produce of the earth—both crops and beasts! This is why ancient pagan civilizations depicted such adoration for these particular objects in their wall paintings and such. It was during this time that an ancient Kenan'ani (Canaanite) practice involving a beast of burden (an ox, cow, or goat of some sort) was killed, and its body seethed (boiled, stewed, i.e. cooked) in its own mother's milk (a symbol of the animal's fertility). This ceremony invoked the powers of both the agricultural gods, as well as the fertility gods. The pagans believed that this sacrificial ceremony would appease these gods into blessing them with health, offspring, and abundant crops. As 'Am Yisra'el observed these foreign practices it was tempting during their own time of "doing without" to be enticed into experimenting with this pagan ritual. This is why HaShem forbids them in verse 19 not to imitate this practice! Indeed, unless we establish the context of this seemingly odd mitzvah, we are left to speculation as to what it means. Unfortunately, the sages of old, without the proper guidance of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), did just that. Not only did the people engage in gross idolatrous practices, but also our sages completely misunderstood the instructions, and turned the mitzvah into some nonsense involving the prohibition of eating milk and meat products in the same meal! This conclusion of theirs is totally out of context with the surrounding verses! Understood correctly I want to emphatically state that I believe that it is not forbidden to eat milk and meat products together. In fact, to prove my point, I site the passage found in a previous portion (Genesis 18:1-8) where the argument from silence is that Avraham served milk and meat products in the same passage. Genesis 18 neither proves a prohibition, nor advances a freedom of mixture.

By way of argument, the context of Deuteronomy 14 does talk about the same topic as Leviticus chapter 11. And in fair context this time the verse about boiling a kid in its mother's milk is mentioned. However, the context of the passage does commence with a prohibition against the forbidden acts involved in pagan rites for the dead, followed immediately by our list of clean and unclean animals. Verse 22 then picks up the themes of specific harvest tithes. Again eating is mentioned. Could we possibly have a valid reasoning behind the rabbi's interpretation of this passage now? Let us look a little closer and see.

Rabbi Isaac Klein speaks of this milk and meat prohibition thusly:

'The separation of milk and meat is the most prominent distinguishing mark of the Jewish home. Most of the laws connected with the consumption of food are the concern of the shohet, the butcher, and the grocer, all of whom are involved before the food reaches the home. With the separation of milk and meat, the family becomes directly involved and the kitchen receives its Jewish character.

'Neither the Bible nor the Talmud gives any rationale for these laws. Maimonides ascribes their origin to Jewish disgust at the fertility rites practiced by the pagan cults of Canaan(*Guide* 3:48). One of these rites was the cooking of a kid in its mother's milk. Dr. Nelson Glueck reports that this practice is still found among the Bedouins of today, not as a pagan rite but as an act of hospitality to a distinguished guest (see also Finkelstein, *Pharisees* 1:58-60, 2:831-32, n.; *Encyclopedia Miqra'it*, 1:89; *Baron, Social and Religious History*, 1:328, n. 22).

'To us this regulation reflects reverence for life and the teaching of compassion. To seethe a kid in its mother's milk is callous. Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel expresses it thus: The goat—in our case, more commonly the cow—generously and steadfastly provides man with the single most perfect food that he possesses, milk. It is the only food which, by reason of its proper composition of fat, carbohydrates, and protein, can by itself sustain the human body. How ungrateful and callous we would be to take the child of an animal to whom we are thus indebted and cook it in the very milk which nourishes us and is given us so freely by its mother (see Ibn Ezra on Exod. 23:19; Dresner and Siegel, *Jewish Dietary Laws*, p. 70).⁴

5. Sources

The laws concerning the consumption and cooking of milk and meat together are based on one verse which is repeated three times in the Torah, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk" (Exod. 23:19, 34:26; Deut. 14:21). The Talmud interprets this prohibition to include all kinds of meat, not only that of a kid, explaining that a kid is mentioned specifically because cooking a young goat in its mother's milk was the prevalent custom (B. Hul. 113b; *Y.D.* 87:2). The term meat, however, is limited to its popular connotation; it does not include fish, or locusts in places where it is permitted to eat locusts (*Y.D.* 87:3).

The rabbis noted that the prohibition is mentioned three times; they interpreted this to indicate that it refers not only to cooking, but also to eating and to the derivation of any benefit (*hanaah*) from the cooked mixture. Thus it is forbidden to cook milk and meat (the very act of cooking), to eat the cooked mixture, or to

⁴ Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1979) p.360.

derive any benefit therefrom. A dish that combines meat and milk may not even be fed to one's dog, but must be disposed of. Since the Bible speaks of "cooking," this stringency prohibiting any benefit from a mixture applies only when the milk and meat have been cooked together, not just mixed (Y.D. 87:1, and Rama).'

(**Source:** *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice by Rabbi Isaac Klein. copyright 1979, 1992, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America*)

Of course the source that Rabbi Klein is referring to is the famous 'Guide for the Perplexed', written by the famous medieval rabbi, Maimonides, also know as the RaMBaM. This guide (in part) can be viewed at:

<http://www.wise.virginia.edu/philosophy/phil205/Maimonides.html>

The book in its entirety can be purchased at Barnes and Noble online:

<http://shop.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbnInquiry.asp?salesurl=&isbn=0486203514>

The prestigious **Encyclopaedia Judaica** comments further on “reasons” for certain food prohibitions and admixtures as found in the teachings of the Torah and the Sages. In an article entitled ‘Dietary Laws,’ a paragraph heading labeled ‘Hygienic Explanations’ states:

Maimonides (Guide, 3:48) noted that "These ordinances seek to train us in the mastery of our appetites. They accustom us to restrain both the growth of desire and disposition to consider the pleasure of eating as the end of man's existence." He also maintained, however, that all forbidden foods are unwholesome: "All the food which the Torah has forbidden us to eat have some bad and damaging effect on the body . . . The principal reason why the Law forbids swine's flesh is to be found in the circumstances that its habits and its food are very dirty and loathsome" (ibid. 3:48). He gives an explanation entirely based on hygienic considerations, for the injunction against the consumption of sacrificial fat (helev): "The fat of the intestines is forbidden because it fattens and destroys the abdomen and creates cold and clammy blood." Concerning the proscription of basar be-halav, Maimonides states: "Meat boiled in milk is undoubtedly gross food, and makes a person feel overfull." He adds, however, "I think that most probably it is also prohibited because it is somehow connected with idolatry. Perhaps it was part of the ritual of certain pagan festivals. I find support for this view in the fact that two of the times the Lord mentions the prohibition, it is after the commandment concerning our festivals. 'Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God' (Ex. 17:23–24; 23:17). That is to say, 'When you come before Me on your festivals, do not prepare your food in the manner in which the heathens do'" (ibid.

3:48). Ancient inscriptions unearthed by archaeologists (e.g., at Ras Shamra-Ugarit) tend to confirm that this was a fertility rite. J. G. Frazer, quoting a Karaite medieval author, writes: "There was a custom among the ancient heathens, who when they had gathered all the crop, used to boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Folklore in the Old Testament, 3 (1919), 117).

Abraham ibn Ezra maintained that the reason for the prohibition of basar be-halav was "concealed," even from the eyes of the wise, although he added "But I believe it is a matter of cruelty to cook a kid in its mother's milk" (Commentary to Ex. 23:19; see: Animals, Cruelty to). A contemporary interpretation, advanced by A. J. Heschel, explains that the goat provides man with the perfect food—milk, which is the only food that can sustain the body by itself. It would, therefore, be an act of ingratitude to take the offspring of such an animal and cook it in the very milk which sustains us.

Many other scholars, however, followed in the footsteps of Maimonides. They pointed out that certain animals harbor parasites that create and spread disease. It was a fact that during the Middle Ages Jews were less prone than their neighbors to the many epidemics of the time. R. Samuel b. Meir declared that "All cattle, wild beasts, fowl, fishes, and various kinds of locusts and reptiles which God has forbidden to Israel, are indeed loathsome and harmful to the body, and for this reason they are called 'unclean'" (Commentary to Lev. 11:3).⁵

As a side note, an examination of Maimonides views on the reasons for sacrificial elements in ancient Judaism show that his view was not always the prevalent one. In an article written for The Department for Jewish Zionist Education, The Jewish Agency, a veteran rabbi notes:

'1. In his Sefer haZikaron, Ritba, reacting to Nahmanides' comment (after quoting Maimonides' Guide, 3;46), writes:

'Our Master (Nahmanides) of blessed memory, rejects the explanation of the sacrifices offered in the Guide for the Perplexed. We need not here repeat his words. It is my opinion that the genuine (kabbalistic) tradition concerning the sacrifices and Maimonides' apparently feeble rationale caused the Master (Nahmanides) to criticize him (Maimonides) for the sake of the sanctity of the Torah and God's holy Name, in the context of the sacrifices. However, Maimonides chose this and many other explanations of the commandments in order to provide them with some

⁵ Encyclopaedia Judaica CD-ROM Edition, Brill Academic Publishers; Cdr edition (June 1999).

meaning and to furnish the masses with some rational arguments against heretics, rather than believing these to be the principal reasons...

'With all due respect to our great Master (Nahmanides) and his divinely inspired word, his zeal confused him and prevented him from examining thoroughly Maimonides' statement. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that Maimonides' explanations contain some elements which do not accord with those of the Kabbalists or other scholars. However, there is neither error nor contradiction in the method he follows, for his carefully presented arguments are full of wisdom and logic.

'Let me now humbly point out the views which Nahmanides wrongly attributes to Maimonides, thus employing arguments which are irrelevant to Maimonides' method of interpretation - and may the Almighty lead us onto the path of truth.

'Our Master, whose pardon I beg, writes that "this is his (Maimonides') lengthy exposition." However, it appears that the length of his exposition did not facilitate its comprehension, for our Master (Nahmanides) apparently concluded that in Maimonides' view the sacrifices were instituted to repudiate the views of the wicked and the foolish, i.e. the Egyptians and Chaldeans. I, however, with my limited intellect, do not glean this from his words. Maimonides' general view of the sacrifices is set out in Part 3, chapter 32 of his work, of which the following is an excerpt (quoting from "Now God sent" until "and not by action" as cited at the beginning of our introduction).

'This clearly demonstrates that according to Maimonides the sacrifices were meant to eliminate the erroneous conception from the minds of our own people, who had also succumbed to idol worship. Unfortunately, our ancestors did not cleanse themselves of that abomination, even after having become a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation. Thus, Moses declared "for I know that after my death you will surely become corrupted" (Deut. 31;29). This is how they acted throughout many generations until they brought upon themselves the dispersion. All this is common knowledge.

'Maimonides' comment quoted by Nahmanides indeed appears in the Guide 3;46, but it refers to the specific animals the Torah declares fit for the altar, and not to the rationale of the sacrifices as such dealt with in chapter 32, which I have quoted. As for the animals fit for sacrifice, i.e., why oxen, sheep and goats have been singled out from among all other animals, this is treated at the beginning of the said chapter (46): "The precepts of the eleventh class are enumerated in the Section on Divine

Service (Sefer Avodah) and the Section on Sacrifices (Sefer haKorbanot) of Maimonides' Code (haYad haHazakah).⁶

So much more can be said concerning the rabbis and the Oral Tradition, particularly on this topic of food. A final quote from Nechama Leibowitz and the **Sefer Hahinukh** will suffice and then I would like to give my closing thoughts on the Torah traditions.

Sefer Hahinukh – Commandment 73: Not to eat trefa (unclean food): Not to eat of *trefa*, as it is stated (**Ex.22:30**): "You shall not eat any meat torn by beasts in the field". Of the reasons of this Commandment is the fact that the body is the vessel for the soul through which it functions, and without which its (the soul's) work can never be accomplished. Hence it (the soul) comes in its (the body's) shadow and not to its detriment, since G-d would not cause ill but only good to all. Thus the body is between its hands, like the tongs in the hand of the blacksmith with which he accomplishes his work which if strong and able to hold (grip) the objects the craftsman will achieve good results, but if the tongs are not good the vessels will not be serviceable. Likewise if there is a defect of any kind in the body, the function of the mind will be affected accordingly. It is for this reason that our perfect Torah keeps us away from anything that damages it.

'This is the simple explanation for all the forbidden kinds of food. And let us not wonder if the harmful effect of some of them is unknown to us and to the medical experts for the trustworthy Healer Who warned us about them is wiser than they, and how foolish he who thinks that only what he can understand can cause damage or bring benefit, you should realize that it is for our benefit that the reason and the harm has not been revealed, lest men, convinced of their great wisdom, will rise and maintain that the harm caused by certain things declared by the Torah exists only in a certain place where this was decreed or only with a certain person who determined it. Lest one of the foolish be persuaded of this, their reason has not been revealed, to save us from this error.'⁷

To sum up my concluding thoughts on both Torah traditions:

What is my understanding of these p'sukim according to the facts presented? Based on the partial ambiguity and difficulties that the thrice-repeated pasuk presents, I do not personally adhere to a universal application of this mitzvah (the prohibition of mixing milk and meat) among Messianics (the key word is

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<http://www.jewishagency.org/jewishagency/english/redirect.htm?target=torani%2finsights%2fvayikra.html>

⁷ http://www.moreshet.net/oldsite/nechama/gilyonot/5760/tzav60_1.htm

“universal”). I cannot speak for the rabbinic camp. However, not only do I respect those who feel led to make this a part of their service to HaShem and his dietary restrictions (both the Messianic and non), I personally keep such a halakhah. Presently I find neither harm nor advantage in separating milk from meat.

It is crucial for us to understand theologically, that the primary purpose in HaShem's giving of the Torah (written and/or oral), as a way of making someone righteous, only achieves its goal when the person, by faith, accepts that Yeshua is the promised Messiah spoken about therein. Until the individual reaches this conclusion, his familiarity of the Torah is only so much intellectual nutrition. Only by believing in Yeshua will the person be able to properly understand HaShem, and consequently, his Word.

The "righteousness" of the Torah is two-fold: 1) "Forensic," which is appropriated the moment one places his unreserved trusting faithfulness in the Messiah prophesied about in the Scriptures; and 2) "behavioral, which is the resulting lifestyle of the former-mentioned righteousness, i.e., Torah submissiveness. The primary difference are the fact that the first one is an act of faith, whereas, the latter is an act of obedience (read Ephesians 2:8-10 carefully, and you will see this progression of circumstances).

Solid hermeneutics will clearly demonstrate that the Messiah did NOT abolish the Torah of Moshe (this would consequently include the oral tradition that is based on the Torah of Moshe!). Moreover, historical, corporate Isra'el is not keeping (or ever kept) all of the Torah correctly—even the traditions handed down since Avraham Avinu (Abraham our Father). The operative word is "correctly." Nor does the "freedom" of Messiah give the Church or Isra'el license to practice "iniquity" (the Greek word here equates to "Torahlessness"). This may be hard to grasp, but if a person has accepted the faith of God, in the (historical) person and work of his Son (past or present), then they are keeping the central part of the Torah! The rest is his journey towards the "works of God" as described in Eph. 2:8-10.

If such an oral tradition leads one towards the above-mentioned righteousness then such a tradition is good and applicable for today's follower of HaShem.

6. “Jack Sprat” Could Eat No Fat... and Neither Could Isra'el!

In Leviticus chapter seven we read about the dual prohibition concerning the consumption of animal fat (chaylev) and blood (dam). Indeed, this topic will become a central point of discussion in both the Torah and the Talmud. Much can be learned from the Chazal (Jewish Sages of antiquity), so let's have a peek at their notes shall we. In this commentary I will be focusing on the famous Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (RaMBaM), a.k.a., Maimonides. Maimonides was the first person to write a systematic code of all Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*; he

produced one of the great philosophic statements of Judaism, *The Guide for the Perplexed*; published a commentary on the entire Mishna; served as physician to the sultan of Egypt; wrote numerous books on medicine; and, in his "spare time," served as leader of Cairo's Jewish community.

Let us first quote some relevant texts:

Lev.7:23 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: You shall eat no manner of fat of ox, or of sheep, or of goat ";

v. 26: "You shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of bird or of beast, in any of your dwellings."

Compare this verse from last week's portion Parashat Vayikra:

Lev.3:17: "It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that you eat neither fat nor blood."

Again we turn to deceased Torah scholar Nechama Leibowitz, who has compiled a selection of relevant notes for us to use in our examination of these dual prohibitions:

Should these verses be relevant for us today? Or do they belong to a period when the Tabernacle and/or Temple were present? In the total number of Commandments compiled by the **Sefer Hahinukh** (which follows RaMBaM's List of Commandments) the author lists the prohibition of eating fat and blood in our parasha (Tzav) and not earlier in Parashat Vayikra, nor does he refer to that verse (3:17), where it appears for the first time. That seems rather peculiar of Moshe doesn't it? The Targumim (Aramaic translations of the Torah) are compared to the standard Masoretic translation of today. First the Masorah:

Lev. 7:24 "And the fat of the beast that died and the fat of that which was torn by beasts may be put to any use, but you must not eat it."

Now compare Targum Yonatan:

Lev. 7:24 "The fat of a beast which became disqualified while being slaughtered or died during a plague and fat of an animal that was torn by a beast – may be used for any work. However, the fat of a kosher animal may be offered up on the altar, but must not be eaten."

R.Naftali Hertz Wiesel [writes]: According to the **Translator Yonatan** "this was said to that generation" – the Desert generation.

Now let us check in with RaMBaM and the Chazal to see if they can add some insights: **The Guide for the Perplexed – III:48**: The fat of the intestines makes us very fat, interrupts our digestion and produces cold and thick blood, it is more fit for fuel. Blood and *nevela* (flesh of an animal that died of itself) are indigestible and harmful as food.”

Sefer Hahinukh – Commandment 147: Not to eat [fat]: That we not eat [fat] of a pure (i.e., permitted for consumption) animal, as it is stated (**Lev.7:23**) "You shall eat no manner of fat of ox, or of sheep, or of goat ." I have already written about the prohibition of eating [unclean food] in Parashat Mishpatim (Commandment 73) that since the body is the vessel for the soul through which it functions, and according to one's merits and temperament one will understand the way of the intelligence of the soul that there is in him and will follow its advice. It is for this reason that one must endeavor to see to the fitness of his body that it should be healthy and strong. It is well known that one's food influences the functioning of the body and its good or bad health, since the body wears out daily and healthy and good flesh will be replaced through good nourishment and bad food will have a deleterious effect. Hence it is one of G-d's great kindnesses bestowed upon us, His chosen people, to keep us from all food that is harmful to our bodies and produces harmful moisture. This is the principle in its simple sense in all forbidden food, as stated above. It is well known that fat clings to the body and produces bad moisture.

Sefer Hahinukh – Commandment 73: Not to eat trefa (unclean food): Not to eat of *trefa*, as it is stated (**Ex.22:30**): "You shall not eat any meat torn by beasts in the field." Of the reasons of this Commandment is the fact that the body is the vessel for the soul through which it functions, and without which its (the soul's) work can never be accomplished. Hence it (the soul) comes in its (the body's) shadow and not to its detriment, since G-d would not cause ill but only good to all. Thus the body is between its hands, like the tongs in the hand of the blacksmith with which he accomplishes his work which if strong and able to hold (grip) the objects the craftsman will achieve good results, but if the tongs are not good the vessels will not be serviceable. Likewise if there is a defect of any kind in the body, the function of the mind will be affected accordingly. It is for this reason that our perfect Torah keeps us away from anything that damages it.

This is the simple explanation for all the forbidden kinds of food. And let us not wonder if the harmful effect of some of them is unknown to us and to the medical experts for the trustworthy Healer Who warned us about them is wiser than they, and how foolish he who thinks that only what he can understand can cause damage or bring benefit, you should realize that it is for our benefit that the reason and the harm has not been revealed, lest

men, convinced of their great wisdom, will rise and maintain that the harm caused by certain things declared by the Torah exists only in a certain place where this was decreed or only with a certain person who determined it. Lest one of the foolish be persuaded of this, their reason has not been revealed, to save us from this error.

Abrabanel: Leviticus Chapter 3: ... and several reasons have been given for why actually G-d chose fat and blood to be offered up on the altar, and why He forbade Israel their... consumption? ... the fourth reason that has been given is that health and beauty cause sinning, and blood causes good health and fat generates beauty. The one whose blood boils sins, as the youngsters do, and fat also causes sinning, as it is stated (**Deut.32:15**), "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked" – it is therefore that G-d commanded to burn on the altar the two bodily elements that cause sinning, as an allusion that it is proper for a person to burn and annul his desires and all that causes him to sin...

And I add a sixth midrashic reason: sin is associated with the red color and forgiveness is represented by white, as the Prophet states: "If your sins will be like scarlet – they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool" (**Is.1:18**). The Lord therefore commanded to offer up on the altar the blood as an allusion to confessing their sins before Him, in the spirit of "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" (**Ps.32:5**), and that they offer up also the fat as an allusion to forgiveness, as it is stated, "Yours is the power to forgive" (**ib.130:4**). Thus the blood and fat were offered up to indicate that just as the sins come before Him, so also does forgiveness come from Him.

Compare RaMBaM's reason for the prohibition of eating chelev to his reason for the prohibition of the consumption of blood! What is the difference between the two reasons? **Rambam Guide for the Perplexed III:46:** "Although blood was very unclean in the eyes of the Sabeans (pagans), they nevertheless partook of it, because they thought it was the food of the spirits, and by eating it man has something in common with the spirits, which join him and tell him future events, according to the notion that people generally have of spirits. There were, however, people who objected to eating blood as a thing naturally disliked by man. They killed a beast, received the blood in a vessel or in a pot, and ate of the flesh of that beast, whilst sitting round the blood. They imagined that in this manner the spirits would come to partake of the blood which was their food whilst they (the people) were eating the flesh and thus the love, brotherhood and friendship with the spirits were established because they all dined together at one table and in one group, that the spirits would

appear to them in dreams, inform them of coming events and be favorable to them.”⁸

Leibowitz sums up our thoughts:

People accepted such ideas in those days, they were general, and their correctness was not doubted by the common people. Therefore the Torah – which is perfect in the eyes of those who know it – and seeks to cure mankind of these lasting diseases forbade the eating of blood, and emphasized the prohibition in exactly the same terms as it emphasizes idolatry: "I will set My face against that soul that eats blood etc." (**Lev.17:10**). The same language is employed in reference to him "who gives of his seed unto Molekh," "then I will set My face against that man etc." There is, besides idolatry and eating blood, no other sin in reference to which these words are used, for the eating of blood used to lead to a kind of idolatry, the worship of spirits. (The Torah) declared the blood pure and made it the means of purifying what it was sprinkled upon: "And sprinkle it upon Aharon and upon his garments etc. And he shall be hallowed and his garments" (**Ex 29:21**). Furthermore (the Torah) commanded the blood to be sprinkled upon the altar, and the whole service was performed by pouring it out and not by collecting it. And (the Torah) says, "and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement" (**Lev.17:11**) and there it is poured out, as it is stated, "And he shall pour out all the blood" (**Lev.4:18**).⁹

7. What is Food? – Part Two

With this understanding at hand, we may now embark on an explanation of some key New Testament texts, often thought to be teaching the abrogation of the dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11, or at the very least, the modification of the definition of "food" itself. Since the Messiah Yeshua has become our ultimate example for understanding how to interpret the Torah, we shall look firstly to one of his commonly misunderstood teaching examples for our own clarification. Later we will turn to the book of Acts to exegete Kefa's (Peter's) vision, and finally we will examine Sha'ul (Paul) and Romans 14 along with 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

8. Jesus and the Pharisees

In **Mark 7:1-23** we find our LORD engaged in a confrontation with the religious leaders of his day. As was often the case, this particular disagreement stemmed from his definition of Torah observance and their definition of Torah observance. Our text indicates that this certain group of Pharisees observed a tradition passed down from the elders called "n'tilat-yadayim" נטילת ידים. This technical

⁸ http://www.moreshet.net/oldsite/nechama/gilyonot/5760/tzav60_1.htm

⁹ Ibid.

term described the ritual process of washing the hands before one consumes biblically kosher food. This tradition, however, is not found in the Torah itself. It is found in the compendium of legal rulings passed from oral instruction to oral instruction, later written down and codified. It would become known as the Talmud. In Yeshua's day, however, it was still known as Oral Tradition. We should not confuse the ritual of washing hands before consuming food with the commandment given to wash before serving at the Holy Places:

17 ADONAI said to Moshe, 18 "You are to make a basin of bronze, with a base of bronze, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. 19 Aharon and his sons will wash their hands and feet there 20 when they enter the tent of meeting - they are to wash with water, so that they won't die. Also when they approach the altar to minister by burning an offering for ADONAI, 21 they are to wash their hands and feet, so that they won't die. This is to be a perpetual law for them through all their generations. (Exodus 30:17-21)"

Indeed, from the beginning of the text, the Pharisees don't have a problem with what Yeshua's disciples were eating; rather, they were having a problem with how they were eating. This careful distinction needs to be pointed out in order for us to establish a proper conclusion to this passage. What is Yeshua's response to their false accusation?

"Yesha'yahu was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites—as it is written, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'" (Mark 7:6-7)

What is the Scripture telling us here? That Yeshua recognized a difference between Torah observance (keeping kosher) and man-made tradition (ritual washing of hands before eating). Moreover, he also chastised them for actually replacing the clear instructions of Torah with their own Oral Tradition. I personally don't have a problem with a tradition that is designed to uphold the Torah. However, tradition must yield when it provides an ostensible license for judgmental attitudes. I personally practice the brakhah of n'tilat-yadayim when I pray the Shacharit (morning) prayers (implied on page 3 of the ArtScroll Siddur, between the "modeh ani" and the "reisheet chokhmah," Sephardic version, but spelled out at page 17):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam
asher kid-shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu***

al n'tilat-yadayim.”

**Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the universe,
Who has sanctified us with His commandments
and has commanded us regarding washing the hands.**

I do not condemn those who do not follow this practice.

In Mark chapter 7 we don't find Yeshua abrogating the Torah, or superceding previously stated commands with his own doctrine. Let us look at a few more verses from this passage.

18 And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) (NASB)

Wait a minute! Isn't Yeshua declaring what we previously read in Leviticus as null and void? Isn't he saying that ALL food is clean? Surprisingly, he IS saying that ALL food is clean, something previously established in the Torah. Yet we commonly make our mistake when we assume that just because "all is clean," that "all is (also) food." This would be in direct violation of the text of Leviticus. Yeshua was discrediting the departure of direct biblical injunction in favor of man-made rules. He was not discrediting the Torah itself. On the contrary, in his own words of Matthew 5:17-20, he did not come to abolish the Torah, but to fulfill it.

"All is clean," yet, "all is not food."

My cryptic statement above means that all that the Torah defines as food is ritually clean without having to submit one's hands to a man-made ceremonial washing before consuming it. Conversely, everything (all) that we in the 21st century church ostensibly call food is not recognized by the Torah as such.

Mark's editorial statement “thus he declared all foods clean” must be understood within the context of Yeshua's immediate didactic teaching, as well as within the Torah and the Judaisms of the 1st century: neither Yeshua, nor his talmidim, nor the Pharisees, and certainly the Torah, would ever consider everything that we moderns call food as food!

We have failed to grasp the central elements of the passage if we walk away believing that “thus he declared all foods clean” means “there is now no longer a distinction between pork and lamb: both are food and meant to be eaten with thanksgiving.”

9. Peter and the Vision

Let us move onto another “New Testament” example. In **Acts chapter 10** we find an interesting story involving “a Jewish man and his commitment to only eat kosher food.” I shall paraphrase the passage to conserve space:

Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, a non-Jew, yet a devout “God-fearer” (Greek=phobeo φοβέω + theos θεός) is instructed in a vision by an angel of God to send for Simon Peter (Shim'on Kefa) to come to his house in Caesarea. The next day in Jappa Kefa—a Jewish fisherman—also has a vision from HaShem concerning a four-cornered sheet containing all manner of animals on it. He is instructed three times to “Rise,... kill, and eat.” All three times he refuses, explaining that he will not eat something *treif* (literally torn, or not fit for consumption), for he has remained kosher all of his life. While the food is still in view, HaShem tells him not to call “common,” Greek=koinoo κοινόω, what He has “cleansed,” Greek=katharizo καθαρίζω (KJV). The vision fades.

Meanwhile, Cornelius has sent men to inquire of Kefa, who eventually accompanies them back to their master. A fairly well sized mix of at least one Jew and many non-Jews gathered together as Kefa met in Cornelius' home later on. Kefa explained that it was not “lawful,” Greek=athemitos ἀθέμιτος for Jews to *schmooze* (mingle) with non-Jews, however, with people (instead of food) now the topic on Kefa's mind, he realizes that HaShem had truly instructed him (Kefa) not to consider non-Jews as “unclean” (Greek=akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) or “common” (Greek=koinos κοινός). Indeed, Kefa proclaims that he now understands, after hearing Cornelius' vision account, that HaShem is “no respecter of persons” (KJV). The good news, that Yeshua can and will save Jew as well as non-Jew, is made clear to everyone in the room. To be sure, as Kefa is speaking, suddenly the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) falls “on all them which hear[d] the word” (KJV). The chapter portion ends with the men being immersed (the last halakhic step normally associated with conversion to Judaism) into the name of ADONAI.

Okay. Let us exegete this passage. Firstly, with the help of Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary (TSBD) we must take special notice of the Greek words I wove into the English commentary above (the Strong's number precedes the word):

- 5399-Phobeo φοβέω (V)+2316-theos θεός (N, M)=feared+God (i.e., God-fearer).

- 2840-Koinoo κοινόω (V)=to make common, to make (Leviticallly) unclean, render unhallowed, defile, profane.
- 2839-Koinos κοινός (A)=common, i.e., ordinary, belonging to generality, by the Jews, unhallowed, profane.
- 2511-Katharizo καθαρίζω (V)=to make clean, cleanse, consecrate, dedicate, purify (morally or ritually).
- 111-Athemitos ἀθέμιτος (A)=contrary to law and justice, illicit, (i.e., taboo).
- 169-Akathartos ἀκάθαρτος (A)=unclean, ceremonially, that which must be abstained from according to Levitical Law, foul.

Even though the above-supplied words and definitions come to us from the TSBDB, itself keyed to the large Kittel and the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), we must allow context to help us sort out the proper applications of the nuances and ways in which the words impact our understanding of the passage. A series of questions and answers should accomplish this goal:

Q: Is Cornelius described as a Jew or something else in the passage? Does it matter?

A: Cornelius is described as a “God-fearing” non-Jew, a man who held a good report among all the nation of the Jews. It matters because according to the prevailing halakhah of the day, non-Jews were not understood to be permitted to follow Torah. The Torah was a Jewish-only document. What is more, if a non-Jew wished to gain covenant status among Isra'el, he or she must convert to Judaism first. Thus, the halakhah stated, “All Isra'el and only Isra'el shares a place in the World to Come.”¹⁰

Q: Is Peter a Jew?

A: Of course he is. He is not a learned Jew, the likes of Sha'ul, but he is a Jew.

Q: Where would Kefa get the chutzpah to tell HaShem “Not so LORD,” in regards to him being commanded to “Rise, kill, and eat...” all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air?

A: Perhaps Kefa was familiar with our passage in Leviticus chapter 11 as well as Deuteronomy chapter 14.

¹⁰ For more on this topic, see my commentary to “*Shomer Mitzvot: Introduction to the Series*” at this link:

<http://www.graftedin.com/images/Parashot/00ShomerMitzvotIntro.pdf>

Q: Why does Kefa make the dual distinction of “common” and/or “unclean” foods in verse 14 (rendered from the KJV)? What do these words convey in their original languages?

A: “Common” in the English of verse 14 is the Greek word *koinos κοινός*. It refers to biblically defined and permitted food (beef, chicken, lamb, etc.) that has been rendered profane, for instance, by contact with that which the Bible forbids and does not define as food (pork, shellfish, shrimp, buzzards, spiders, mouse, etc.). The force of this word, when compared to *akathartos ἀκάθαρτος* is that *koinos κοινός* connotes that which man declares unclean, whereas *akathartos ἀκάθαρτος* connotes a God-given declaration of uncleanness. This Greek word *koinos κοινός* is not found in the Septuagint (LXX) reading of Leviticus chapter 11, the Greek version of the TaNaKH. Kefa cannot comply with the LORD’s request because the sheet clearly contains both food and non-food items, of which the food items have now been declared by himself as contaminated (common “*koinos κοινός*”) by contact with the non-food items (“...I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” KJV). The English term “unclean” in this verse is the Greek word *akathartos ἀκάθαρτος*. This word is a composite of the article “a” plus the word “*kathairo καθαίρω*.” *Kathairo* means “to cleanse, of filth or impurity,” and the article “a” is used to negate the meaning, that is, give the opposite significance,¹¹ thus, *akathartos ἀκάθαρτος*=unclean. However, this time, we have the equivalent Hebrew term of this word showing up in the LXX version of Leviticus chapter 11. Everywhere the Hebrew word *tamei טמא* is found, the LXX chooses *akathartos ἀκάθαρτος*. To fully grasp Kefa’s choice of wording, we must understand that a Jewish definition of applying *akathartos* to that which the Torah describes as non-food stems from the conclusion that HaShem created certain animals intrinsically “*tamei*” (unclean) and others intrinsically “*tahor*” (clean). This is not a defect in the animals themselves. This speaks of the superior intellect of a Creator that is in control over the ecosystem that he created. Some animals ingest helpful items and consequently produce toxins. Other creatures ingest toxins and consequently produce helpful waste in its place. Obviously I am describing biological symbiosis. Even if we argue against this logic, based on our lack of understanding, we cannot argue that God told Noah (Noah) to gather two of each kind of every unclean animal into the ark while also commanding him to collect seven couples of the clean animals!

1 ADONAI said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household; for I have seen that you alone in this generation are righteous before me. 2 Of every clean animal you are to take seven couples, and of the animals that are not clean, one couple; 3 also of the birds in the air take seven couples - in order to preserve their species throughout the earth (Genesis 7:1-3).

¹¹ TSBD, *καθαίρω*.

How are we to argue that clean and unclean is only related to the Torah that Moshe handed down when Noach lived thousands of years prior to any written Torah that we know of?! The argument is pointless. God knew which animals were clean and which were unclean because he made them that way and he obviously endowed Noach with a way to tell!

Q: When HaShem responds to Kefa's refusal, he only instructs Kefa not to call common (koinoo κοινόω) that which he (God) has cleansed katharizo καθαρίζω. Why doesn't HaShem also teach Kefa not to call unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) that which God has ostensibly cleansed katharizo καθαρίζω?

A: Obviously God has not cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) those animals that he created to be intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος!) If I, Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, the author of this commentary, could convey this single, important point to your average Christian pastor, then we would not be having this conversation at all! The vision is just that—a vision! The proof that God is not truly altering Kefa's paradigm in regards to food but rather to non-Jews is born out by the careful attention to not mention akathartos ἀκάθαρτος in verse 15, yet by his Ruach HaKodesh impress Kefa to utilize the word akathartos ἀκάθαρτος in regards to non-Jews in verse 28. The Levitical definition of permitted and forbidden animals, as outlined in chapter 11, cannot change! God remains the same both yesterday, today, and forever! Why would he need to change the rules governing the definition of food with the arrival of his Son? It makes nonsense to suppose such a reading of Acts chapter 10! To be sure, if God were supposedly changing the rules, giving the information to a "country bumpkin" like Kefa—and in a vision no less—is the wrong way to go about doing it, wouldn't you agree? We should not suppose that this is a mystery hidden from the Jewish people only now to be revealed after his Son has gone to the execution stake (on the same level as the mystery of the gospel that the Gentiles are now to be welcomed into Isra'el as full-fledged covenant members if they place their trust in Yeshua).

Q: If HaShem is not cleansing (katharizo καθαρίζω) unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) animals then what is he cleansing? How are we to understand the vision?

A: I personally believe that Kefa's interpretation of his own vision is the best and most important interpretation offered. Namely this: what HaShem has designated as *kosher* (fit for consumption) and *treif* (not fit for consumption) in the Torah of Moshe, concerning food, still remains clean (tahor טָהוֹר) and unclean (tamei טָמֵא) respectively. Although the sheet contained all manner of animals, I believe what HaShem is trying to get Kefa to understand is that the animals represent all manner of peoples, not the literal animals themselves. This interpretation is in accord with the unchangeable nature of HaShem. To be sure, is this not how Kefa interprets the vision himself in verses 28, 34 and 35?

28 He said to them, "You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean.

34 Then Kefa addressed them: "I now understand that God does not play favorites, 35 but that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what people he belongs to (Emphasis, mine).

Q: But I thought that the Torah forbade Jews from having contact with Gentiles. Isn't that what Kefa explicitly tells his Gentile associates in verse 28, which you quoted above?

A: Observe Acts 10:28 in 10 various, yet common English translations (the original Greek word athemitos ἀθέμιτος has been identified and underlined in each version):

NASB (New American Standard Bible): And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

GWT (God's Word Translation): He said to them, "You understand how wrong it is for a Jewish man to associate or visit with anyone of another race. But God has shown me that I should no longer call anyone impure or unclean.

KJV (King James Version): And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

ASV (American Standard Version): and he said unto them, Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another nation; and yet unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean:

BBE (Bible in Basic English): And he said to them, You yourselves have knowledge that it is against the law for a man who is a Jew to be in the company of one who is of another nation; but God has made it clear to me that no man may be named common or unclean:

DBY (Darby Bible Translation): And he said to them, Ye know how it is unlawful for a Jew to be joined or come to one of a strange race, and to me God has shewn to call no man common or unclean.

WEY (Weymouth New Testament): He said to them, "You know better than most that a Jew is strictly forbidden to associate with a Gentile or visit him; but God has taught me to call no one unholy or unclean.

WBS (Webster Bible Translation): And he said to them, Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come to one of another nation; but God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

WEB (World English Bible): He said to them, "You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man who is a Jew to join himself or come to one of another nation, but God has shown me that I shouldn't call any man unholy or unclean.

YLT (Young's Literal Translation): And he said unto them, 'Ye know how it is unlawful for a man, a Jew, to keep company with, or to come unto, one of another race, but to me God did shew to call no man common or unclean.

Isn't it interesting that from 10 English translations all but 3 render our Greek word as "unlawful?" The GWT, the BBE, and the WEY, however, attempt to supply a slightly different nuance than unlawful to this word, an attempt I call commendable. Even The Scriptures, a version popular among Messianics, leaves room for questioning the real intent of the translators:

And he said to them, "You know that a Yehudite man is not allowed to associate with, or go to one of another race. But Elohim has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

The Greek word *athemitos* ἀθέμιτος, found in only two places in the Apostolic Scriptures,¹² is a composite of two Greek words: the word *tithemi* τίθημι meaning "to set, put, place, set forth, establish," and again, the article "a" rendering the word *tithemi* τίθημι into its negative value.¹³ Thus *athemitos* ἀθέμιτος does convey the notion of "unlawful," but we should carefully note that if Kefa were wanting us to understand that such a prohibition were rooted in the written word of God, the Torah, then he would have used a conjugation of the Greek word *nomos* νόμος which normally refers to God's Torah. To be sure, our writer Luke uses *anomos* ἄνομος at Acts 2:23 (rendered "wicked" in KJV and "godless" in the NASB) when referring to those men who crucified Yeshua. The TSBD

¹² Acts 10:28; 1 Peter 4:3

¹³ TSBD, ἀθέμιτος.

defines the adjective anomos ἄνομος as “destitute of the Mosaic law, departing from the law, a violator of the law, lawless, wicked.”¹⁴ By comparison, the adjective athemitos ἀθέμιτος refers to that which, although not written down, is simply socially unacceptable, viz, taboo, but certainly not proscribed by Mosaic Law. David Sterns CJB is a better translation of this pasuk:

He said to them, "You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean (Emphasis, mine).¹⁵

The Torah of Moshe never prohibits Jews from “keeping company” or “coming unto one of another nation.” This statement of Kefa’s reflects the “ethnocentric Jewish exclusivism” baggage that the Torah communities of his day had engineered, baggage not uncommon among people groups who are marginalized. In other words, Kefa was just regurgitating the standard mantra of his day. This did not excuse his error, which is why HaShem went through all the trouble to send him the vision in the first place.

In the end, the message of the Acts 10 vision is crystal clear: Gentiles in Yeshua are not intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος), as the 1st century Judaisms were professing. They, like all men, have been created in God’s image, and as such, can be viewed as defiled (koinos κοινός) by the stain of sin, in need of cleansing (katharizo καθαρίζω). Man, created clean (katharos καθαρός), fell to a state of unclean (koinos κοινός), later to be declared cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) by the blood of the Sacrificial Lamb of God if he accepted such an offer. To use the language of the vision: Jews are not lambs while Gentiles are pigs. Rather, Jews and Gentiles are both lambs! Both have become unclean (koinos κοινός), by sin; both have been cleansed (katharizo καθαρίζω) by Yeshua! No one is intrinsically unclean (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος)! No one was created sinful! Born into sin, yes; created sinners, no!

However, it must be carefully noted that God himself reserves the right to look into the life of a man, recognize his hardened heart, his rejection of Jesus and his continual proclivity to sin, and ultimately pronounce such a man “damned,” “cursed,” viz, “unclean ἀκάθαρτος.” Would God really do that to such an individual? Would an “all-loving” God rightfully send a person to hell for his continual and unrepentant sin? Observe the language of Ephesians 5:5:

¹⁴ TSBD, ἄνομος.

¹⁵ For a thorough treatment of Stern’s reasoning behind his translation of this verse see his Jewish New Testament Commentary, pp. 258-259.

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (KJV).

Did you notice the underlined word “unclean” above? Care to guess what the original Greek word is? Yup. You guessed it! Akathartos ἀκάθαρτος! “But,” you object, “I thought that God did not create anyone akathartos ἀκάθαρτος!” This is true. Men are created “innocent” (katharos καθάρως). However, man has the free choice to reject God’s Messiah and thus leave God no choice, as it were, but to ultimately and finally pronounce him “unclean” (akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) in the Heavenly Court of Law, thus man effectively condemns himself. But until such a sentence is passed, men, both Jews and Gentiles alike, are given grace to repent. All men are created innocent (katharos καθάρως). Kefa’s assessment (the standard Jewish song and dance) that “the Gentiles were to be avoided” was wrong from the word “go.”

Gentiles are to be accepted as bonafide Isra’elites without having to succumb to any man-made conversion rites. Again, in the language of the vision: pigs (an unclean animal, viz, tamei תמי/akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) do not need to become lambs (a clean animal, viz, tahor תהור/kathairo καθαίρω) in order to be accepted into Isra’el. What is more, Gentiles in Yeshua are to be treated as “cleansed” (katharizo καθαρίζω) in every sense of the word! No longer should the Jewish believers view them with suspect. The sociological borders of Isra’el have been expanded to make room for those whom God is calling out from the nations into his chosen family of the faithful remnant! We have now properly demonstrated a better historical, sociological, theological, and grammatical treatment of Acts chapter 10.

10. Paul’s Persuasion

Finally, a well-known and oft-cited passage in Romans warrants our attention:

14 I know - that is, I have been persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah - that nothing is unclean in itself. But if a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean; 15 and if your brother is being upset by the food you eat, your life is no longer one of love. Do not, by your eating habits, destroy someone for whom the Messiah died! 16 Do not let what you know to be good, be spoken of as bad; 17 for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh (Romans 14:14-17).

Again, as with the passage in Acts, a knowledge of the social setting as well as the original Greek words will unlock the secrets to a proper understanding of this passage. Firstly the Greek word “akathartos ἀκάθαρτον” is not found in this

passage at all. Remember, akathartos ἀκάθαρτον conveys that which is intrinsically unclean. Sha'ul is not discussing the issue of pork vs. lamb. The word Sha'ul opts for when confessing that “nothing is unclean in itself” (Greek=οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ) is—you guessed it!—koinos κοινὸν! Sha'ul is discussing matters of biblically defined food being declared by one man as “okay to consume” versus another man declaring it “not okay to consume.” His conclusion to this passage is found near the final verses:

17 for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh. 18 Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people. 19 So then, let us pursue the things that make for shalom and mutual upbuilding. 20 Don't tear down God's work for the sake of food. True enough, all things are clean; but it is wrong for anybody by his eating to cause someone to fall away. 21 What is good is not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22 The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. Happy the person who is free of self-condemnation when he approves of something! 23 But the doubter comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin (Emphasis, mine).

The word I underlined above in verse 20 (“clean”) is the Greek word katharos καθαρα, defined as “clean, pure, blameless, innocent.”¹⁶ Again, Sha'ul is not teaching us that the dietary list of Leviticus 11 has been discarded. In fact, Sha'ul is really reiterating what his Teacher, the Master, taught him: all is clean!... that is, until a man comes along and declares it otherwise. In the end, it is our petty differences and pride that eventually divides us. Food simply becomes the “innocent” medium that we fight about. Sha'ul states that food should not be the point of contention. This sounds amazingly like Sha'ul's instructions to Timothy in his first letter:

1 The Spirit expressly states that in the acharit-hayamim some people will apostatize from the faith by paying attention to deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come from the hypocrisy of liars whose own consciences have been burned, as if with a red-hot branding iron. 3 They forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods which God created to be eaten with thanksgiving by those who have come to trust and to know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing received with thanksgiving needs to be rejected, 5 because the word of God and prayer make it holy (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

¹⁶ TSBD, καθαρα.

Again, foolish men within the Torah communities are found to be pushing their foolish agendas on everyone around them, judging those who don't hold the same opinions as them. Are we to imagine that Sha'ul's solution is to simply yield to these apostates and accept anything and everything under the guise of ecumenism and love? Are we to now accept that homosexuality is okay? How about adultery and fornication? If you have answered "NO!" to these questions, because the Word of God will not allow you to answer otherwise, then you must follow through with your hermeneutic principle and apply the same answer to the question of whether or not everything is now to be considered food and ostensibly received with prayer and thanksgiving! This passage is not suggesting a situation where Jewish Christians are telling Gentile Christians that pork and shellfish are forbidden, with the Gentile Christians arguing that pork and shellfish are now okay in Jesus! Sha'ul's definition of food is the very same definition that his Master held to! Summing up both the Romans passages and this passage here in Timothy: Sha'ul is not suggesting a "vote-based" righteousness. Man cannot vote on which days we are to worship (cf. Romans 14:5, 6) any more than he can vote on what defines marital fidelity or what is food! The passages in question from Sha'ul cannot be saying that we should apply one standard of righteousness to worship days and marital relations while simultaneously applying a different standard of righteousness to food. We cannot have it both ways! Either God's complete Word is our standard of righteous living or it is not! Picking and choosing has never been the allowable vote.

11. Penalties/Remedies

What are we to make of the data we have now encountered concerning clean and unclean food? Someone may ask, "What was the penalty for coming into contact with that which was unclean? What was the penalty for ingesting unclean food? What's the big deal anyway?" The Torah seems to indicate that uncleanness can be identified on at least two basic levels: unclean in regards to HaShem and his Holy Sanctum, and unclean in regards to your fellow man. The Torah prescribes at least two differing yet related types of remedy for restoration from tamei. To be sure, tamei is described as having the capability of being transmitted from the original carrier to other living and organic items (to include humans).

In Leviticus 5:1-13 a person who is guilty of carcass defilement (contact with the carcass [Hebrew=n'veilah נבלה] of a dead animal, either clean or unclean), whether he is aware of it at the time or not, must eventually bring an asham (guilt offering) and/or a chata'at (sin offering) and/or an olah (burnt offering) to the priest (details may differ depending upon the economic status of the individual), so that HaShem will clear him of guilt incurred were he to approach the Holy Sanctum.

In similar fashion, an individual who becomes defiled with a carcass (eating its flesh, implying touching its carcass) but cannot or is not planning on visiting the Holy Sanctum is merely “to wash his clothes, bathe himself in water, and remain unclean until evening (Leviticus 17:15, 16). To be sure, Leviticus 11:24-43 utilizes the same language when describing both humans and foodstuffs that become contaminated by contact with death. His impurity is described as having the ability to be transmitted to others in the community, thus the nature of his confinement and the prescription commanded. The JPS commentary adds to our understanding of the topic of penalty/remedy:

The key word in chapter 11 is [tamei], an adjective meaning “impure”; and the chapter concerns itself with the prevention of impurity and with its elimination, once contracted. No rituals of purification involving water, oil, or blood are prescribed for cleansing a person of impurity that resulted from eating forbidden foods, per se. Nevertheless, the physical contact necessarily involved in eating forbidden foods required sacrificing a sin offering, according to the law of 5:2.¹⁷

Thus the topic of tamei and tahor are complicated matters when viewed from the western mind. What is more, these topics lose much of the force of their meaning in the absence of a Holy Tabernacle, Temple, or closed community like ancient Isra'el of the TaNaKH period.

12. Closing

HaShem commands that his true worshippers establish a distinction between what is "holy" and what is "common." HaShem's treatment—and subsequently our treatment—of food and non-food serve to accomplish this distinction very nicely.

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¹⁷ Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary to Leviticus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 64.