



# תורת חיים Torat Chayim

## Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park

בס"ד

Shemini/HaChodesh

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*This issue of Torat Chayim is dedicated to the soldiers of the IDF, the hostages, and the wounded.*

### Ramban on Our Parshah: We Are Kosher-Keeping Kohanim

The past few parshiyot detailed the rites of korbanot and recorded the Mishkan's weeklong dedication. With that complete, our parshah turns to the next major theme of Sefer Vayikra: the rules and procedures of *tumah* and *taharah*. These passages (chapters 11-15) are essential for the kohanim, inasmuch as they govern a kohen's right to enter the Mishkan, perform sacred tasks, and consume korbanot and tithes.

But first, the Torah devotes 23 sentences to the lists and definitions of kosher animals, sea creatures and fowl. Why are these laws, which relate to **all** Jews, located in a section that deals primarily with the laws of kohanim? Ramban (commentary to Vayikra 11:1) offers three answers:

- The laws of *tumah* distinguish between kosher and non-kosher creatures, so the lists of animals, sea creatures and fowl relate to the overall discussion of *tumah* and *taharah*.
- Kohanim bring korbanot on behalf of Jews who make mistakes in kashrut, and so they need to know these laws.
- Kohanim are commanded to distinguish between the sacred and the mundane, and between the *tamei* and the *tahor* (Vayikra 10:10). Kashrut is part of that exercise.

Ramban's third answer provides a powerful insight into the spiritual value of kashrut for kohanim and non-kohanim. Commentators identify many benefits of kashrut, including preserving health, avoiding idolatry associated with particular materials (i.e. blood), and isolating us from our neighbors. Ramban suggests that kashrut is an act of **sanctification**, exercising judgment and choosing our diet based not on desire, but religious commitment.

This is consistent with a point made by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch regarding the dining experience, in his work *Horeb* (#463): "The human meal, although in itself a physical function, is ennobled and elevated above other animal functions by the fact that the organ which serves it is at the same time the servant of the noblest human activity, of human speech. The mouth of man is, on account of its functions, eating and speech, also the reconciling bond between spirit and animal... That is why you should approach your meal as you would a holy activity."

This may also be the meaning of a comment by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Bereishit Rabbah 44:1), "Why would Hashem care whether we slaughter an animal from the front or back of the neck? The mitzvot were given only to purify people." All of us play the role of kohanim when we dedicate our diet to Hashem.

### Parshah Riddles for Kids (answers on the back)

Age 4-8: Which of these animals is kosher: a) rabbits, b) buffalo, c) owls?

Age 8-12: Who took the bodies of Nadav and Avihu out of the Mishkan? (See Vayikra 10:4)

Age 12+: According to Rashi, why did Hashem tell Aharon to bring a calf as a korban on Day 8 of the Miluim?

### Journey Through Tanach: Shoftim, Introduction

The book of *Shoftim* records the national life of the Jews after Yehoshua's death, until the rise of Shemuel. This corresponds, roughly, to the 13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

Two central themes define this book:

- **The Hand of Hashem** – Each story begins with the Jews failing to fulfill Divine instructions, and Hashem turning them over to their neighbors. Salvation comes about through Hashem's appointed emissary. The book is the opposite of Megillat Esther, which hides Hashem's role and presents each event as a result of human motivation. *Shoftim* hides human motivations and presents each event as a result of Divine manipulation. Our success and failure are in Hashem's hands.
- **The Failure of the Jews** – As noted by Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer (*Bigdei Shesh*, Introduction to *Shoftim*), "No book in Tanach expresses failure like the book of *Shoftim*." As we follow the paths of the shoftim and the evolution of the Jews in their land, we observe descent into a lifestyle reminiscent of the Canaanite cities we meet in Bereishit, and especially

Sdom. As the final section of the book states repeatedly, "There was no king in Israel, and each person would do what was right in his eyes." This sets the stage for the rise of the monarchy, as a corrective for the sins of the *Shoftim* era.

There is great debate regarding the nature and role of the shoftim themselves:

- Some believe that the shoftim were righteous, held quasi-royal authority, served as judges, and were part of a continuous (but not hereditary) chain of leadership. Don Isaac Abarbanel championed this view.
- Others argue that there were greater and lesser shoftim, some of whom were not even mentioned in the book of *Shoftim*. (See Malbim to *Ruth* 1:1.) They arose as needed, and were not necessarily judges, but leaders of one kind or another. (See Radak to *Shoftim* 9:22 and 10:1.) Dr. Yehuda Elitzur provides a compelling analogy: Moshe was the Sun, Yehoshua was the Moon, and the shoftim were varied like the stars. (*Daat Mikra*, Introduction to *Shoftim*)

## The 613 Mitzvot: #27, 39 - Idols and Forms of Humans & Animals

In the Aseret haDibrot, Hashem warns, "You shall not make a sculpture or any picture. (Shemot 20:4)" Sefer HaChinuch sees here the Torah's 27<sup>th</sup> mitzvah, prohibiting manufacturing statues for worship. Per the Rambam, it also includes commissioning such statues.

Additionally, Hashem commanded, "You shall not make with Me gods of silver and gods of stone (ibid. 20:20)," which prohibits making forms of 'Hashem's image', meaning the human form (Rosh Hashanah 24b). Rabbeinu Chananel (ad loc.) explained that even though Hashem has no form, Hashem appeared to Yechezkel with the image of a person (Yechezkel 1:26). Sefer HaChinuch records this as the Torah's 39<sup>th</sup> mitzvah, noting that it even applies to forms which are not meant for worship. But according to the language of the Rambam (Hilchot Avodah Zarah 3:10) and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 141:7), the prohibition applies only to three-dimensional forms, not two-dimensional pictures.

Our sages have understood the biblical text to prohibit creating forms of celestial bodies and angels, too. The prohibition also includes creating forms mimicking the different parts of the Beit haMikdash (Yoreh Deah 141:8). However, animal forms may be sculpted, so long as they are intended for pleasure rather than worship. [See Tosafot Yoma 54b.]

If an item was worshipped by non-Jews, but its own followers have since rejected it, it does not retain 'idol' status.

## Israel's Chief Rabbis: Obligatory Wars, Rav She'ar Yashuv Cohen

Rav Eliyahu Yosef She'ar Yashuv Cohen was born in 1927 to the "Nazir of Jerusalem", a 17<sup>th</sup> generation rabbi and close student of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, and Sarah Etkin, founder of the forerunner of the Emunah organization. It is said that he played violin for Rabbi Kook when he visited.

Rav Cohen was raised as a nazir. As a student at Yeshivat Mercatz haRav, he joined the Resistance against the British Mandate, and was released from the nazir's prohibition against haircuts to facilitate his Resistance activities. He continued to abstain from wine, though, and he was a vocal vegetarian.

During the War of Independence, Rav Cohen defended Jerusalem and Gush Etzion; he was severely wounded, and imprisoned by the Jordanians. After his liberation, he served seven more years, and went on to become Chief Rabbi of the Air Force. In the 1960's he served as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem. In 1975 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Haifa; he also headed the Harry Fischel Institute for Talmudic Research and Torah Law. He served three consecutive terms on the Board of Governors of the University of Haifa. He passed away in 2016.

During the First Lebanon War (1983), Rav Cohen was visiting troops when he was asked whether a kohen who killed someone as part of IDF service could still perform *birkat kohanim*, since the Rambam (Hilchot Tefillah 15) and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 128) rule that a kohen who sheds blood is ineligible. He ruled that a kohen who shed blood as part of a *milchemet mitzvah* (obligatory war) could still perform *birkat kohanim*, and as part of his response he discussed the application of *milchemet mitzvah* to the First Lebanon War.

He quoted Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (Mishpat Kohen 147:22) empowering a democratically elected government to declare a *milchemet mitzvah* and compel participation, even beyond the halachic boundaries of Israel. The only criterion is that the goal be to save Jews or to prevent conquest of Eretz Yisrael. He acknowledged that a gemara (Sotah 44b) says that wars meant to prevent future attacks on Jews might not be called *milchemet mitzvah*. However, he said that although the explicit goal of this war was about local peace in the Galil, the true purpose was peace in all of Israel, preventing attacks by the PLO as well as pursuing peace with Lebanon. This would certainly constitute a *milchemet mitzvah*.

## Upcoming Learning!

All classes are open to men and women and free of charge, unless otherwise noted

7:25 PM Shabbat April 6

**Halachic Prenuptial Agreements, Part II**, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

8:30 AM to 9:15 AM Sunday April 7 — **Last week with bagels and spreads!**

**Fourteen Centuries: Rav Hai Gaon**, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, in the lobby at Eitz Chayim

8:00-9:30 PM Monday April 8, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtorcz>

**Medical Ethics: Updating the Determination of the Moment of Death**

Please register at <https://torontotorah.com/cme> Accredited for CME, non-medical professionals welcome

8:15-9:00 PM Tuesday April 9

**Gemara Makkot** with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, for men, at **745 Evergreen** (note change of venue)

**8:30-9:15 PM Monday April 15 Haggadah Night!**

**Seder-ready divrei torah by Rabbi Efrem Schwalb, Mrs. Beaty Menchel and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at ECDP**

Age 4-8 B: Buffalo  
Age 8-12 Their cousins, Mishael and Eltzafan  
Age 12+ To show that Hashem forgave him for his role in the Golden Calf. See Rashi to Vayikra 9:2.

Answers to Parshah Riddles

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