

# A New Yavneh Publication

19 Elul 5768 // 19 September 2008

## Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Menachem Lazar

In a number of places the Rabbis urged caution when acting in a manner which others may misinterpret as halachically problematic. For example, the Torah prohibits us from drinking the blood of mammals and fowl (Lev. 7:26-27), though permits us that of fish. However, if the blood of a fish is gathered in a cup, for example, drinking from that cup would be prohibited because the nave passerby may mistakenly believe he is watching the wrongful consumption of mammal or fowl blood. The Talmud explains that an exception to this rule is made when the cup also contains scales—the casual observer will understand that our fish-blood-lover, while perhaps somewhat bizarre, is engaged in no unquestionable behavior.

The early achronim discuss a similar case related to mixing milk and meat. While one is biblically prohibited from cooking meat in animal milk, cooking it in soy milk, rice milk, &c. is entirely permissible. Based on the Talmudic discussion about fish blood (cited above), the 16th century Polish Maharshal thought that cooking meat in almond milk should be forbidden unless almonds are visible with the meat. This step of caution will prevent misunderstandings of many kinds. Although not unanimous, this position of the Maharshal has become generally accepted.

One area in where this issue arises is in the use of non-dairy creamer and parve ice-cream at fleishig meals. Contemporary poskim debate whether or not some visible sign stating the true, non-dairy identity of these product is warranted in such cases, especially in light of the ubiquity of such products in the cuisine of the average kosher-keeping consumer. I hardly need to write that respectable opinions line both sides of this debate.

One short thought about some implications of this halacha. The halacha asks us to concern ourselves not only in the legal propriety of our actions, but also in how they are viewed, interpreted, and even possibly misinterpreted by others. Joined together as a community in which each of us learn from—and effectively teach—others, we must responsibly bear in mind how our behavior influences those around us.

## A Quick Thought

By Rabbi David Wolkenfeld

As we begin to recite *selihot* this *motzei Shabbat*, our preparations for *Rosh Hashannah* and *Yom Ha-Kippurim* enter a more intense stage. The spiritual intensity of this season is perhaps best captured in *Rambam's* famous words in *Hilkhos Teshuvah* (Prof. Twersky's translation):

Although the sounding of the *shofar* on the New Year is a decree of the Written Law it has a deep meaning, as if saying, "Awake, awake, O sleeper, from your sleep; O slumberers, arouse yourselves from your slumbers; examine your deeds, return in repentance, and remember your Creator..."

It is necessary, therefore that each person should regard himself throughout the year as if he were half innocent and half guilty and should regard the whole of mankind as half innocent and half guilty. If then he commits one more sin, he presses down the scale of guilt against himself and the whole world and causes its destruction. If he fulfills one commandment, he turns the scale of merit in his favor and in favor of the whole world, and brings salvation and deliverance to all his fellow creatures to himself.

For Rambam, the *shofar's* call should remind us of a perpetual spiritual truth. As human beings, our existence is in perpetual balance between salvation and destruction. A terrifying equilibrium that we can only keep in our consciousness for a few weeks of the year - if for that long. Even the angels tremble, in the unforgettable words of *u'netaneh tokef*, in anticipation of God's judgement on *Rosh Hashannah*.

The opening paragraphs of *Parashat Ki Tavo*, however, describe an entirely different religious mood and paint a bucolic pastoral scene of happy farmers, baskets overflowing with the fruit of *Eretz Yisrael* and religious confidence. Upon bringing *bikurim* to Jerusalem, the farmer's declaration places his own harvest as the happy ending of Jewish history. In Robert Alter's translation:

"... And the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with portents. And He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

# A New Yavneh Publication

19 Elul 5768 // 19 September 2008

And now, look, I have brought the first yield of the fruit of the soil that You gave me, Lord.”

Instead of the “lachrymose theory of Jewish history,” the farmer sees Jewish history as a path that has lead directly to his own relationships to his land and his people’s connection to God. The sense of religious confidence is heightened in the text that the Torah offers to the farmer upon completing his separation of *terumot* and *meisrot*:

I have rooted out what is to be sanctified from the house and, what’s more, I have given it to the Levite and to the sojourner, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to all Your command that You charged me. I have not transgressed Your command and I have not forgotten. I have not eaten of it in mourning, and I have not rooted it out while unclean, and I have not given of it for the dead. I have heeded the voice of the Lord my God according to all that you charged me. Look down from Your holy dwelling place, from the heavens, and bless your people Israel and the soil that You have given us as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Instead of our endless list of *al-heit’s* - the *vidu’i* of the farmer is a declaration of having met his responsibilities to the poor and fulfilled God’s command. Instead of angels trembling at the thought of God’s judgement, the farmer actively calls upon God to look down and judge him and Israel - so confident is the farmer that he has done all that he should.

The religious tension of the *Yamim Nora’im*, infused with existential dread, is a necessary component of religious growth for most of us. And yet, the awareness of God that characterizes and defines Rambam’s description of the messianic era is rooted in the confidence and bounty of the opening *pesukim* of *Parashat Ki Tavo*. Peace, security, and prosperity, are means to the end of living a life devoted to contemplating God. While it is frightening for us to contemplate God’s reality and his omniscient gaze, ultimately the awareness of God is meant to be a joyful knowledge. In the words Rambam used to conclude his *Mishneh Torah*:

The sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over

the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come.

In that era there will be neither famine nor war, neither jealousy nor strife. Blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all. The one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the Lord. Hence Israelites will be very wise, they will know the things that are now concealed and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost capacity of the human mind, as it is written: “For the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

## Announcements

- Mazal tov to the Wolkenfelds on the upcoming brit milah of their Twin A. The ceremony will be this Sunday morning in the CJL, shacharit starting at 8:30AM and the brit ceremony starting by 9AM.
- The Talmud Shiurim continue this week, with the beginners shiur 8PM–9PM Monday and the advances shiur after maariv for an hour Tuesday (roughly 7:15PM–8:15PM). It’s not too late to join!
- Lunch-n-Learn continues too this week! It moves to its regular time this week at 12PM in the small dining hall, free for upperclassmen and grad students. The topic this week is “The Case of the Killer Kohen”—check out one of the posters up around the CJL for more details!

## Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	6:30 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	6:35 PM
Saturday Maariv	7:50 PM