

PARASHAH: Sh'mini (Eighth)
ADDRESS: Vayikra (Leviticus) 9:1-11:47
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Welcome to **Parashat Sh'mini**. While our portion this week deals with the actual beginning of the priestly service in chapter nine, and the first tragic misuse of the priestly position (the death of Aharon's son's Nadav and Avihu) in chapter ten, the portion's most prominent feature are the laws of **kashrut** as they are outlined in chapter eleven. Accordingly, it is there that I want to focus our study. May HaShem's holy Word penetrate deep into the very fiber (pun intended) of your being as you seek to discover the Truth afresh!

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)

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

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

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.”

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 both ritual as well as physical (with hints of contagion) alike are in question here, since the text explains that merely coming in “contact” with the carcass renders a person

² Ibid., טָמֵא.

³ Ibid., שֶׁקֶט.

ritually “tamei.” To be sure, among the rabbinical attempts at interpreting Scripture, p’shat (plain, literal), remez (hint), drash (search), and sod (hidden), ritual uncleanness borders on the p’shat. I would have to agree that physical 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 stands 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.

Oral Tradition?

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.

To sum up my concluding thoughts on both Torah traditions:

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.

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.

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” נְטִילַת יָדַיִם. This technical 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?

“Yasha'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 יְיָ 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 superseding 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.”

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 TSBD, itself keyed to the large Kittel and the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TWNT), 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.”⁴

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.

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,

⁴ For more on this topic, see my commentary to “*Shomer Mitzvot: Introduction to the Series*” at this link: <http://www.graftedin.com/s/00ShomerMitzvotIntro.pdf>

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,⁵ 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 with observable traits and behaviors that warrants their biblical label "tamei" (unclean), and others without certain observable traits and behaviors that warrants their biblical label "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 some type of biological symbiosis. Even if we argue against this logic, based on our lack of understanding, we cannot argue that God told Noach (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 Noach, "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).

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 declaratively clean and which were declaratively unclean because he made

⁵ TSBD, καθαίρω.

them with observable characteristics that warranted their labels, and he obviously informed Noah of these differences!

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 declaratively 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,⁶ 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.⁷ 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 defines the adjective *anomos* ἄνομος as “destitute of the Mosaic law, departing from the law, a violator of the law, lawless, wicked.”⁸ 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:

⁶ Acts 10:28; 1 Peter 4:3

⁷ TSBD, ἀθέμιτος.

⁸ TSBD, ἄνομος.

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).⁹

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:

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,”

⁹ For a thorough treatment of Stern’s reasoning behind his translation of this verse see his Jewish New Testament Commentary, pp. 258-259.

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 טָמֵא/akathartos ἀκάθαρτος) do not need to become lambs (a clean animal, viz, tahor טָהוֹר/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.

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 ἀκάθαρτος” is not found in this passage at all. Remember, akathartos ἀκάθαρτος 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 κοινός! In fact, this is the only verse in the entire Bible where koinos κοινός is (mis)translated as “unclean,” instead of “common” like it should read! 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* καθαρός, defined as “clean, pure, blameless, innocent.”¹⁰ 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).

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

¹⁰ TSBD, καθαρός.

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.

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 5:2.¹¹

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.

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.

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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¹¹ Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary to Leviticus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 64.