

Parashat Re'eh 5772, 2012:

Milk, Meat, and the Pursuit of the Holy

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, my sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, and Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Yehonatan Binyamin Halevy ben Golda Friedel, and Moshe Reuven ben Chaya.

There are many commandments that define the universe of Torah Judaism. In all likelihood, most of us would disagree as to exactly which ones ought to be included on such a list. Yet, if we use a minimalist definition as our bar of judgment, Shabbat, Kashrut, and Mikvah surely must emerge as constitutive elements of what we call “Orthodox Judaism.” Each of these essential mitzvot, in turn, contains an endless sea of halachic principles and *hashkafa* (Torah thought) that enable us to live and think according to the dictates of our holy Torah. Let us now see how a particular aspect of the Laws of Kashrut epitomizes these ideas.

On a very practical level, the litmus test for a kosher Jewish home is the separation of milk and meat dishes. This is a rabbinic derivation of the Torah prohibition of “*Lo tivashel gedi b’chalave emo*” (You may not cook a kid-goat in its mother’s milk). This *lav* (negative commandment) is mentioned three times in the Torah: *Sefer Shemot* 23:19, 34:26, and in our *parasha* in *Sefer Devarim* 14:21. From the three-fold repetition of this proscription, *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) deduced three separate and distinct Torah prohibitions: cooking (in any form) milk and meat together, eating milk and meat that has been cooked together, and deriving any form of benefit from milk and meat that has been cooked together. (*Talmud Bavli, Chulin* 113b and 115b)

This *lav* is different in kind and degree from any other “eating-based” prohibition in the Torah, since even cooking milk and meat together (an act devoid of pleasure in and of itself) is proscribed. Indeed, *basar b’chalav* (meat cooked in milk) is considered by our Sages to be something new and unique, i.e. a *chiddush*:

...it [*basar b’chalav*] is a *chiddush*. And for which reason ought it to be considered a *chiddush*? Perhaps it is based on the idea that each separate component is permissible and it is only when they are combined that the prohibition obtains? [No!] this is surely not unique to *basar b’chalav* since we find the same exact manner of prohibition when it comes to *kilayim* (diverse kinds of seeds that have been planted together) wherein one kind of seed and another by themselves are permissible to be planted. Yet, when combined, it is forbidden to plant them together. [Wherein lies its uniqueness?] However, if you soak meat in milk the entire day [even though it absorbs the taste of the milk - Rashi] it is still permissible [from the point of view of the Torah – although it is a Rabbinic prohibition to eat such a mixture]. However, if one cooks it, it is forbidden [by the Torah]. (*Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 44b*, brackets and translation my own)

Basar b’chalav is therefore a unique entity within the world of Halacha. It is subject to exceptional stringencies that simply do not obtain in any other instance of food-based laws. Moreover, most *poskim* (halachic authorities) envisage *basar b’chalav* as having its own identity (*davar b’ifnei atzmo*). This means that it is not merely a mixture of milk and meat that has been cooked together. Instead, via the cooking process, it has been transformed into something different, into its own unique creation. This concept, perhaps, helps us understand just how different *basar b’chalav* is from anything else within the canon of Jewish law.

A great deal of ink has been spilt in attempting to explain the rationale for the prohibition of *basar b’chalav*. I believe that the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) offered the most compelling presentation of this topic in his commentary on our *parasha*. His first explanation provides us with a different approach than any of those taken by the majority

of the commentators of our tradition. He opined that *basar b'chalav*, in and of itself, is not something disgusting or untoward. The reason for its proscription is something else entirely. He maintained that it is forbidden “so that we will be holy in regards to the foods [that we eat].” This idea of holiness, of separation (*prishah*), is a theme throughout his *Commentary on the Torah*, and its most famous formulation is found at the beginning of Parashat Kedoshim. Therein he stated that we must be so conscious of pursuing the idea and the ideal of the holy that we must separate ourselves from overindulgence even in those things that are permissible to us. Logically, therefore, we surely must be scrupulous in separating ourselves from those things that are forbidden to us. Thus, *basar b'chalav* is crucial element Hashem’s plan for the sanctification our people. For the Ramban, then, even the food we eat must lead us on the path and pursuit of *kedushah* (holiness).

May it be the Master of the Universe’s will that we will always grow in our pursuit of *kedushah* in all of our words and actions. By following this course of action to achieving holiness, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the coming of the true Messiah, soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdb718@gmail.com.

My audio *shiurim* on *Tefilah and Haskafah* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/7sp5vt3>

*** I have recently posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik’s** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

**Follow new postings on my Twitter accounts: @theRavZatzal and @Torahtech613.