**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT RE’EH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Re’ei reviews some of the basic laws of *kashrut*, identifying the properties which render certain creatures permissible for consumption. Fish, the Torah commands, may be eaten only if they have both *senapir* (fins) and *kaskeset* (scales – 14:9-10).

The Mishna in Masekhet Chulin (59a) identifies the *kaskeset* as scales which are “*kevuim bo*” – permanently attached to the fish. Rashi explains that the Mishna’s intent is to distinguish the scales from the fins, which sway back and forth. The scales differ from the fins in that they do not move at all on their own, as they are firmly attached to the fish’s body.

The Ramban, in his commentary to Sefer Vayikra (11:9), writes that the Mishna’s comment must not be understood to mean that scales which constitute part of the fish’s skin qualify as halakhic *kaskeset*. If the fish has scales which cannot be removed from the skin even by hand or with a knife, these scales do not meet the definition of “*kaskeset*,” and that species is forbidden for consumption. The Ramban draws proof from the Gemara’s comment (Chulin 66b) describing the *kaskeset* as “*levusha*” – a “garment.” This indicates that the scales must be external to the skin, and not part and parcel of the skin. Additionally, the Ramban notes, Onkelos translates the word “*kaskeset*” as “*kalfin*,” which the Ramban interprets to mean “peel.” This would suggest that the *kaskeset* must be something which can be “peeled” off the fish’s skin, and not part of the skin. Rav Menachem Kasher, in his *Torah Sheleima* (to Vayikra 11:9, note 46), references in this context the verse in Sefer Bereishit (30:37) which tells of Yaakov peeling wooden sticks to produce white stripes, and Onkelos translates that verse as, “*ve-kalif behon kilfin*” – using the root *k.l.f.*, corroborating the theory that Onkelos understood *kaskeset* as something resembling a peel.

The *Noda Bi-yehuda* (*Tinyana*, 28) questions the Ramban’s claim, noting that this condition – that the scales can be peeled off the skin – appears nowhere in the Gemara. He adds that the plain meaning of the Mishna, which speaks of the *kaskeset* as “*kevu’im bo*,” indicates that the *kaskeset* is indeed part and parcel of the fish. Rav Kasher suggests refuting this argument based on Rashi’s comments to the Mishna, emphasizing that the *kaskeset* are described as “*kevuim*,” attached to the fish’s skin, only in relation to the fins, which sway freely. This emphasis is quite likely intended to clarify that if the scales are embedded within the skin to the point where they cannot be separated from it, then they do not meet the definition of *kaskeset*.

The *Noda Bi-yehuda*’s student, Rav Elazar Fleckeles (in *Teshuva Mei-ahava*, 3:329), raises a different question regarding the Ramban’s comments. In Parashat Tazria (13:2), *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* translates the word “*sapachat*” – one of the skin discolorations that constitute *tzara’at* – as “*kilofi*.” *Tzara’at* infections involve changes of the skin’s color, not peeling skin, and thus the use of the root *k.l.f.* in that context might indicate that this root does not necessarily denote peeling, as the Ramban contended. (Rav Kasher suggests answering this question based on the *Arukh*’s discussion of the root *k.l.f.*, where the *Arukh* explains that even *tzara’at* infections involve the exposure of inner layers of skin.)

In any event, the Ramban’s position is cited as authoritative *halakha* by the Rama, in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 83:1), where he writes that a fish with scales that cannot be peeled off the skin is not permissible for consumption. As Rav Kasher references in his discussion, different views exist as to whether the scales must separate from the skin through soaking in hot water, or if it suffices even if they can be separated only manually.

Sunday

As we noted yesterday, the Torah in Parashat Re’ei reiterates the basic laws determining the status of various creatures with respect to human consumption, including the prohibition against eating a species of fish that does not have both fins and scales (14:9-10).

The Gemara in Masekhet Chulin (66a) establishes that if a species has both fins and scales, but they normally fall from the fish’s body once it is removed from the water, the species is nevertheless permitted for consumption. Even though the fins or scales are not present after one catches the fish, it may be eaten, since it originally had this property which determines its kosher status. This *halakha* is codified in the *Shulchan Arukh* (Y.D. 83:1).

Rav Avraham of Strikov is cited as having pointed to this law as symbolic of the way we should view ourselves in periods of spiritual struggle or decline. Sometimes we might feel that progress which we have made in the past is no longer discernible in our conduct, that after having worked to achieve greater levels of religious devotion, we have slipped and fallen. Particularly as the month of Elul and the *Yamim Noraim* approach, we might feel disheartened by seeing how our efforts to grow and change during this season in previous years did not yield permanent results. Such thoughts discourage us from investing similar effort this time around. The Rebbe of Strikov urges us to look at the example of the fish, which retains its status of permissibility even after its scales or fins have fallen from its body. Even if it no longer appears “pure” (the term commonly used to refer to kosher species), *Halakha* nevertheless regards it as such because of its past. Similarly, even if we do not feel or appear any different as a result of our past efforts to grow, in truth, we retain at least some element of the “purity” we achieved at that time. No genuine effort to improve is wasted. Even if we lose our “fins” or “scales,” and the effects of our progress are no longer discernible, we can still rest assured that we have retained some degree of that progress, that we are better off because of the work we invested. This realization should encourage us to continue striving to move forward, confident that every bit of work yields valuable, permanent dividends even when it appears not to.

Monday

Moshe instructs the people in Parashat Re’ei that after they take possession of the Land of Israel, they must destroy all the sites where the Canaanites had worshipped their deities, which were found “on the high mountains and on the hills, and under every lush tree” (12:3). He then warns, “Do not do such for the Lord your God. Rather, to the place which the Lord your God shall choose…there you shall bring your burnt-offerings…” (12:4-6). Rashi explains that the warning, “Do not do such for the Lord your God” refers to the aforementioned practice of the pagans to set up sites of ritual worship throughout the country. *Benei Yisrael* were to designate only a single site for sacrifices, a site which God Himself would choose. Of course, this ultimately was the site of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in Jerusalem.

However, Rashi also cites a different explanation, one which appears in the Gemara (Makkot 22a), according to which the command “Do not do such for the Lord your God” means that we must not dismantle or deface sacred artifacts. After instructing *Benei Yisrael* to destroy the sites of pagan worship, Moshe warns them not to do anything destructive to articles of sanctity, such as the *Beit Ha-mikdash* or its furnishings, or sacred text, such as Names of God. Accordingly, the Rambam lists as one of the Torah’s prohibitions (*lo ta’aseh* 65) the command not to destroy sacred articles, referencing this verse as the source.

The question arises as to how to explain, according to this halakhic reading of the verse, its connection with the next verses – “Rather, to the place which the Lord your God shall choose…there you shall bring your burnt-offerings…” If the command “*Lo ta’asun kein*” (“Do not do such”) refers to the destruction of sacred articles, then why would Moshe then continue by telling the people, “Rather, to the place which the Lord your God shall choose”?

Chida, in his *Nachal Kedumim*, cites a creative answer to this question, suggesting that according to the Gemara’s halakhic interpretation of this verse, the next verse speaks of the lone exception to the rule forbidding the destruction of sacred articles. There is one instance when the Torah not only permits, but requires, erasing God’s Name, and that is during the *sota* ceremony, when a husband suspects his wife of infidelity. Under certain conditions, the husband would have to bring his wife to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and a special ceremony – which included the erasure of text that included God’s Name – would be conducted to determine the wife’s innocence or guilt. The Gemara (Sukka 53a) viewed this law as reflecting the great importance the Torah accords to peaceful relations between husband and wife, as God commanded that His Name should be erased in order to affirm the suspected wife’s innocence and thereby repair the strained relationship. Thus, Chida cites a source explaining that after the Torah forbids destroying sacred property, including the erasure of sacred text, it adds, “Rather, to the place which the Lord your God shall choose,” emphasizing that erasing God’s Name is allowed only in the *Mikdash*. It is only under the specific circumstances of the *sota* ritual that the Torah authorizes the extraordinary measure of erasing God’s Name. One might have thought that this aspect of the *sota* ritual establishes a general precedent allowing anything, even the drastic measure of erasing God’s Name, for the lofty purpose of easing tensions between a husband and wife. We might have concluded that for the sake of peace and harmony, we can do away with the Torah’s rules – pointing to the procedure in the case of a *sota* as establishing that peaceful relations take precedence over all Torah law. Therefore, the Torah here emphasizes that the extraordinary provision in the case of a *sota* marks a striking exception – one which indeed demonstrates the great importance of marital harmony, and of peaceful relations among people generally, but which must not be used as a basis for recklessly compromising religious standards for the sake of peace.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Re’ei (15:2) introduces the command of *shemitat kesafim*, which requires forgiving outstanding debts once every seven years, during the *shemita* year. Just as all farmers must consider their produce ownerless during the *shemita* year, such that anybody may come and collect it, similarly, creditors must waive their rights to repayment. (During the Second Temple period, Hillel devised the *prozbul* system to circumvent this law, a system which is still commonly practiced even today.)

Rav Yisrael of Modzitz, in *Divrei Yisrael* (Parashat Emor), suggests that the broader message of this command applies and is relevant to all of us, even those who do not lend money. He cites the Gemara’s ruling (Kiddushin 22a) that if one purchases an indentured servant, he assumes the obligation to pay for the servant’s needs, as well as the needs of his family. Hence, the *Divrei Yisrael* writes, as all *Am Yisrael* “belong” to the Almighty as His servants, He bears the obligation, as it were, to support us, to provide us with an adequate livelihood. And in this sense, every Jew is a “creditor” – as we are all “owed” our sustenance by God, who has “acquired” us as His servants. The requirement of *shemitat kesafim*, the Modzitzer Rebbe suggests, teaches us to be forgiving with regard to God’s “debt” to us. Even if we feel entitled to more, if we find ourselves struggling and lacking what we need or want, we must be willing to “forgive” our “debt” – just as creditors are to forgive their debts on the *shemita* year.

More generally, perhaps, the law of *shemitat kesafim* teaches us of the need to be flexible and yielding when it comes to our demands and expectations. Not everything that is rightfully owed to us should necessarily be demanded or pursued. Certainly, we have reasonable expectations of other people which we may insist upon – just as normally, a creditor is fully entitled and expected to claim debts owed to him. However, the exception of *shemitat kesafim* shows us that there are exceptional circumstances which warrant flexibility and the relaxing of our demands. We do not need to, and should not, insist upon everything we feel we rightfully deserve. We need to exercise our common sense, our sound judgment, and our sensitivity in deciding when to be insistent and when to be forgiving in our interpersonal dealings. Our model is the Torah institution of *shemitat kesafim*, which teaches us that although generally we are fully entitled to demand we are owed, sometimes the appropriate thing to do is to forgive and waive our entitlements.

Wednesday

Among the *mitzvot* presented in Parashat Re’ei is *shemitat kesafim* – the remission of debts on the *shemita* year (15:2). The Mishna in Masekhet Shevi’it (10:8), cited by the Gemara in Masekhet Gittin (37b), establishes that when a borrower approaches the lender to return the loan after *shemita*, the lender must proclaim, “*Meshameit ani*,” informing the borrower that he forgives the loan. And if the borrower then tells the lender that he nevertheless wishes to repay the debt, the lender may accept the money.

The Gemara, after bringing this Mishna, proceeds to cite an ambiguous remark by Rabba: “*Ve-tali lei ad de-amar hakhi*.” Rashi and the *Tosafot Rid*, surprisingly, explain this to mean that the lender has the right to undertake coercive measures to compel the borrower to repay the loan. According to this reading, the lender is required to cancel the debt, but the borrower, for his part, bears a moral obligation to repay it, to the extent that the lender can apply pressure until he does so. Other *Rishonim* find this reading untenable, raising the question of how the lender can force the borrower to repay the debt which he is required to waive. The Rosh explains Rabba’s comment differently, understanding it to mean that the lender can expect the borrower to repay. He may not undertake coercive measures, but he can express his desire and expectation to be repaid.

The *Mesoret Ha-Shas* notes (which appear in the standard edition of the Talmud) references the *Arukh* as emending the text of the Gemara, such that this statement is attributed to Rava, as opposed to Rabba. The Klausenberger Rebbe, in *Divrei Yatziv* (6:29), suggests that the *Arukh* was led to make this emendation because of a story told several lines later about the time when Rabba had a debt which he was required to cancel after *shemita*. The borrower brought him the money, and Rabba, as the Mishna requires, informed him that he canceled the debt, whereupon the borrower left. Rabba felt despondent over losing this money, and so his disciple, Abayei, went to the borrower and encouraged him to repay the loan. The Klausenberger Rebbe writes that the *Arukh* may have wondered why Rabba felt helpless and despondent, given his own statement that a creditor may apply some degree of pressure upon the debtor to repay the loan. And for this reason, the *Arukh* emended the text, such that it was Rava, not Rabba, who made the statement, “*Ve-tali lei ad de-amar hakhi*.” Rabba did not agree with this rule, as evidenced by his reaction of helplessness after cancelling his debt.

The Klausenberger Rebbe suggested explaining on this basis why the Rambam, in his presentation of these laws in *Hilkhot Shemita Ve-yovel* (chapter 9), omits a *halakha* mentioned in the Yerushalmi (Shevi’it 10:3), that the debtor may outstretch his hand in the debtor’s presence to request repayment. The Rambam may have felt that this statement reflects the view of Rava, entitling the creditor to apply some kind of pressure on the debtor to repay the loan. Rabba, the Rambam understood, maintained that this is forbidden. The story of Rabba indicates that in his view, the Torah prohibition of “*lo yigos*,” which forbids the creditor from claiming the loan after *shemita*, also forbids him from subtly expressing his desire or expectation to receive the money. The Klausenberger Rebbe draws our attention in this context to the prohibition of “*lo tiheyeh lo ke-nosheh*” (Shemot 22:24), which forbids pressuring a borrower to repay the loan if he does not have the means to repay. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 75b) teaches that this includes even making subtle hints to the borrower that he needs to repay the debt. By the same token, perhaps, the Rambam maintained that even subtly asking for the loan’s repayment after *shemita* violates the prohibition of “*lo yigos*.” Whereas Rava maintained that this prohibition merely denies the lender legal recourse, taking away his ability to claim the debt in court, Rabba understood that it forbids doing anything in an effort to secure repayment, and the Rambam followed Rabba’s opinion.

Thursday

The Torah commands in Parashat Re’ei (12:13), “Be careful, lest you bring your burnt-offerings anywhere that you see.” This command is presented as part of the Torah’s discussion of the centralized location that would be chosen for the offering of sacrifices. In contrast to the pagans, who set up temples and places of worship in many different places, the Torah demands that *Benei Yisrael* set aside one site as the exclusive location for sacrificial offerings, a site which God Himself would choose.

The question arises as to why the Torah in this verse includes the words “*asher tireh*” – “that you see.” Why did it not simply forbid sacrificing “anywhere” other than the designated location (meaning, the *Beit Ha-mikdash*)? Why did it emphasize that one must sacrifice anywhere “that he sees”?

Rashi, citing the *Sifrei*, explains this phrase to mean that we may not sacrifice in a location which we ourselves “see” as suitable, but we may and must sacrifice in a location stipulated by a prophet. The exception to the rule forbidding sacrifices anywhere outside the *Beit Ha-mikdash* is when a prophet determines that a sacrifice must be offered in such a location. According to the *Sifrei*, the Torah here alludes to the time when the prophet Eliyahu offered a sacrifice on Mount Carmel in his confrontation with the prophets of the pagan god *Ba’al* (Melakhim I 18). By emphasizing that the prohibition applies only to places “that **you** see,” the Torah indicates that when a prophet sees fit to order the offering of a sacrifice somewhere other than the *Mikdash*, he should be obeyed.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, in his *Va-yavinu Ba-mikra*, notes that the Gemara does not appear to follow this interpretation of the verse. In Masekhet Yevamot (90b), the Gemara establishes a general rule to obey a confirmed prophet even when he commands violating a Torah law (as a one-time exception). The Gemara infers this rule from a verse later in Sefer Devarim, in which the Torah commands obeying a prophet (“*eilav tishma’un*” – 18:15). As such, Rav Karp writes, the phrase here in Parashat Re'ei, “*asher tireh*” cannot, according to the Gemara, be understood as establishing the particular provision of obeying a prophet’s instruction to sacrifice outside the *Mikdash*.

Rav Karp therefore suggests a different explanation, proposing that the Torah here perhaps warns against sacrificing even in a place from where the *Beit Ha-mikdash* can be seen. During the time when the *Mishkan* was situated in the town of Shilo, all areas around Shilo from where the *Mishkan* was visible had, in some sense, a status of sanctity. (Specifically, sacrifices in the category of *kodashim kalim* were allowed to be eaten even beyond the area of the *Mishkan*,in places where the *Mishkan* was visible.) Perhaps, then, the Torah here emphasizes that once the permanent *Beit Ha-mikdash* is erected, all sacrificing is forbidden even in places “where you see” – from which one can see the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. One might have mistakenly concluded that the areas surrounding the Temple Mount, from which the Temple is visible, may have the same level of sanctity such that sacrificing there is allowed. The Torah therefore emphasizes that even in such locations, near the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, sacrificing is forbidden.

Symbolically, the prohibition of *shechutei chutz* (offering sacrifices outside the *Beit Ha-mikdash*) might represent the general mistake of pursuing spiritual meaning and fulfillment in the wrong ways. Just as the Torah forbids sacrificing wherever we please, so must we ensure not to practice religion in any way we please. There are rules and guidelines for how to serve God, and we cannot decide on our own how this should be done. The specific warning not to offer sacrifices in areas from where the *Mikdash* is visible might then alert us to the specific danger of religious practices and ideas which are “near” the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*,” which seem authentic and true, but aren’t. Sometimes a certain action or belief seems “religious,” but in truth is situated outside the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*,” is foreign to the precepts which the Torah teaches. We must exercise care to ensure that all our “sacrifices” – our expressions religious devotion – occur in the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*,” in accordance with the teachings of our Torah tradition.

Friday

Yesterday, we noted the Torah’s command in Parashat Re’ei (12:13), “Be careful, lest you bring your burnt-offerings anywhere that you see.” Once the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was built, it became forbidden to offer sacrifices in any other location.

Rav Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz, in *Mei Ha-shiloach*, finds it significant that the Torah here mentions specifically “*olotekha*” – “your burnt-offerings,” referring to the *ola* sacrifice. This sacrifice is unique in that no portions of the animal are eaten. When other sacrifices are offered, some portions are burned on the altar, while others are eaten by the *kohanim* ministering in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. In fact, when a *shelamim* sacrifice is offered, the one who brought the sacrifice receives most of the meat. The *ola*, however, is entirely burned on the altar. The *Mei Ha-shiloach* writes that the *ola* sacrifice thus represents actions which people perform without receiving any benefit from them. It symbolizes altruism, when we act selflessly, without expecting anything in return. The command, “Be careful, lest you bring your burnt-offerings anywhere that you see,” the *Mei Ha-shiloach* writes, teaches that our altruism must be channeled in the right direction, solely to God.

Alongside our natural selfish instinct, we also have a natural altruistic instinct. On the one hand, we are driven to care only for ourselves, but we also have an ingrained desire to find meaning and purpose by selflessly extending ourselves for something beyond ourselves. The *Mei Ha-shiloach* here urges us to ensure to direct this altruistic drive towards truly meaningful and proper goals. Sometimes, our desire to give or to sacrifice for a higher purpose could lead us to give to and to sacrifice for the wrong purposes. In our quest to experience the fulfillment and gratification of being altruistic, we might mistake unworthy goals for worthy ones. We might offer our “*ola*” sacrifices, and give of ourselves, to things which are not worth sacrificing for. Just as our innate selfish instinct must be channeled in the proper direction – to care for our general wellbeing – so must our innate altruistic instinct be channeled in the proper direction, in the genuine and authentic service of the Almighty.

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