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**Safeguarding Shechita: Kosher Meat in the UK**

**By Shimon Cohen**



**Shimon Cohen, Campaign Director of Shechita UK**

“Shechita is safe for you in the UK [United Kingdom or Great Britain]!”

This is a remark I often hear from my American or Israeli peers.

In Europe, as many readers know, Shechita is always under threat as it stands an exemption to the law requiring animals to be mechanically stunned before they are killed. Shockingly, in 2019, for example, in the Flanders region of Belgium, Shechita was banned.

Indeed, across the continent, Shechita is exposed legislative attacks, with countries often hovering precariously close to banning Kosher meat production. One slip of the pen in any Bill could outlaw Shechita and establish a dangerous legal precedent that could ripple across Europe.

The same, however, is true for us here in the UK as well. Like in Europe, the practice of Shechita is only allowed under a derogation of the law and so laws could be enacted which would make it banned or unviable. It remains a great irony that in the UK, our Shochtim are certified and regulated by both Jewish supervisory bodies and the government. So Shechita is entirely accountable, licensed, and vouched for by UK law but still not explicitly legal, existing only as an exception!

**Opposition From Many Supposedly**

**“Distinguished” and Impressive Groups**

Many prominent British organisations, ostensibly lobbying in the name of tzaar baalei chayyim, constantly and consistently oppose non-mechanically stunned slaughter and want to ban Shechita in the UK. The British Veterinary Association (BVA), RSPCA, and Compassion in World Farming, for example, have waged long-standing campaigns against us.

Shechita is often painted by these groups as a crueller, inhumane alternative to mechanical stunning. Much of the general public have been swayed by these castigations, making our cause to protect and vouchsafe Kosher meat provision politically unpopular and difficult.

Such understandings, however, are mistaken.

Let us make no doubt about it, the entire lives of these animals’ matter, not just how they are slaughtered. For an animal to be considered kosher it must be healthy. Animals allocated for kosher meat are treated with care and respect, well above the industry norm. Any animal which is even slightly harmed or damaged ahead of the Shechita process is unfit to be eaten. The cows, lambs, and chickens that will eventually make it onto a Kosher table are raised on lower density farms, given access to the green outdoors, fed with higher quality food, and must be free from diseases.

**Judaism Cares About Preventing Pain to Animals**

Yiddishkeit emphatically demands that no creature be subjected to any needless pain or abuse. Jews are commanded to limit the loads their animals can carry and before they partake of any meal, Jewish animal-owners must first feed their livestock. Reams of literature from Chazal until today, spanning millennia, strongly advocate for animal welfare. There is not a single major section of Halacha, I am told, where the principle of preventing pain to animals does not feature. Thus, the overall life of a kosher animal or bird is of a higher standard than many intensively farmed animals, whether they are mechanically stunned before death or not. Yiddishkeit demands so.

Great care is taken to ensure that the animals are well-treated and calm before slaughter, as is mandated by Jewish law. The cut must be swift, smooth, and precise. Any animal or bird which is even slightly harmed prior or during the slaughter is not Kosher. There is an ample body of scientific evidence that suggests that Shechita is indeed a humane method of slaughter, causing instant death, and it is categorised as such by many countries across the world, including the USA. It even conforms to the EU definition of stunning: “Any intentionally induced process which causes loss of consciousness and sensibility without pain, including any process resulting in instantaneous death,” by causing an immediate loss of cerebral perfusion (blood-flow to the brain). So, Shechita is a practice entirely in adherence to animal welfare standards.

**The Hypocrisy of Mechanical Stunning**

Mechanical stunning, it’s oft-cited rival, on the other hand, is not as sanitized or smooth a process as the term implies. People assume that these mechanically stunned cows and pigs are gently and caringly induced into a comfortable, blissful sleep, a woozy and kind procedure. These procedures include asphyxiation by gas, electrocution using metal tongs strapped around the animal’s head, immersing the animal upside down into an electrified or boiling water-bath, and shooting a captive bolt through their skull. All inflict a certain degree of pain upon application, and can, and often do, go horribly wrong.

Historically, these stunning methods were first used by large-scale factory abattoirs simply to solve the problem of animals thrashing about during slaughter and slowing down production lines. These businesses wanted to speed up their slaughtering conveyer belt, and so tried to render their long line of animals unconscious before slaughter.

**Mechanical Stunning Frequently Goes Wrong**

Mechanically stunning the chain of animals before they were killed had nothing to do with animal welfare, and the evidence supporting mechanical stunning for animal welfare reasons remains inconclusive. Furthermore, these methods frequently go wrong.

Banning Shechita has never been about Animal Welfare. Instead, it has been about population control, or, in other words, good old xenophobia and antisemitism. The bans against Shechita were first introduced on the back of migration across Europe. In the late 1800s, violent pogroms caused many Jewish communities to flee eastern Europe and migrate to safer central European countries.

Those central European governments, however, often harbored antisemitic attitudes. Outlawing religious slaughter was used as a way of deterring Jews from immigrating to their countries. Such was the tactic Switzerland used in 1892, outlawing Shechita with a ban that continues to this day. They found a way, tragically and shockingly, to limit the immigration of Jews into Switzerland.

Similarly, Norway’s 1929 ban was also fueled by antisemitism, with its fascist party at the time under the sway and inspiration of Nazism. More recent bans or proposed bans to religious slaughter, such as in Denmark in 2014, have also been driven by hatred and xenophobia, often now towards Muslim migrants.

**The Constant Need to be Vigilent**

In the UK, we must always be vigilant. My team at Shechita UK are constantly monitoring all manner of agricultural bills and Parliamentary debates to make sure that Shechita is not in the firing line. The Animal Sentience Bill was a law to form a special committee whose role would be to scrutinize all laws passed in regard to animal welfare. We were instrumental in creating a clause within the Bill to ensure that the committee would be forced to respect “religious rites,” including Shechita.

To be sure, we have had a strong and close relationship with the UK government’s Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and are ever grateful to Members of Parliament and leaders who have stood in support of Kosher meat production. However, unfortunately, we do still need to monitor the political landscape.

In short, Shechita, sadly, remains under threat both in Europe and here in the UK. This is not a debate about kindness or cruelty, nor about animal rights versus religious freedoms. Shechita meets all the standards for animal welfare, and we should never forget that. It is a fight against misinformation. At Shechita UK we are trying to combat it. Someday, I hope, my American and Israeli peers will be right.

*Reprinted from the March 15, 2023 website of Yeshiva World News.*

**Your Talking is**

**Precious to Me**

**By Rabbi Nachman Seltzer**

*He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoketo him from the Tent of Meeting, saying (1:1).*

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1:6) tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was distressed at not having been granted the opportunity to contribute anything to the Mishkan.

Hashem responded by saying, “By your life, I enjoy your speech more than anything else. So, you are the only one I called,” as it says, “He called to Moshe.”

What did Moshe do that pleased Hashem so much?

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:9) elaborates with a pasuk (Mishlei 27:18), “He who guards the fig tree will eat its fruit.” Why does the pasuk specifically use the fig tree as an example and not any other kind of tree?



The answer lies in the difference between the fig tree and every other tree. On most trees, all the fruits become ripe at the same time, but on fig trees the fruits ripen in stages. One needs to guard its fruit to prevent the birds from eating it.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the overseer of the work on the Mishkan. He supervised all the minutiae, and was moser nefesh to make sure that all the work met Hashem’s specifications and didn’t deviate in the slightest from what Hashem commanded. It was as though the Mishkan was a fig tree that he watched over as each stage developed.

The work of the Mishkan was therefore attributed to him, as the Torah states, “On the day that Moshe finished…” The Midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu’s speech was incredibly beloved by Hashem. That implies that Moshe was the one doing the talking.

However, the Midrash cites the pasuk, “He called to Moshe,” where we find Hashem doing the talking and not Moshe. When the Midrash says, “Your speech is beloved by Me,” it’s referring to Moshe’s ongoing discussions with the craftsmen and those who were doing the construction. This devotion on Moshe’s part was more beloved by Hashem than anything donated by anyone else.

Why is that? He who convinces people to do a mitzvah is greater than the one who does it himself (Bava Basra 9a). Moshe was the one who stood behind the people and inspired them to maximize their potential, and Hashem treasured him for it and told him not to feel bad, since it was his doing that was the cause of everything else.

That is why Hashem called Moshe and secluded Himself alone with Moshe inside the Mishkan. It was as if Moshe himself had done everything and therefore it was all attributed to his name. This is also why the pasuk concludes with the word “saying,” which implies that because Moshe Rabbeinu told everyone what to do and how to do it, he was called to come before Hashem, because it was his power of speech that had succeeded in constructing the perfect Mishkan and it was all attributed to him.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5782 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book - Zera Shimshon from Rav Shimshon Chaim Nachmani.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on How Can One Know Whether He is Spending Too Much Effort on Earning a Living**

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**ANSWER:** Now if I could answer that question, I would become a millionaire; I would open an office because very many people have asked me that question during the years.

It is impossible to know. The only thing I know is that what to do about that problem depends on you. If you know what to do with your time, then you are going to begin to snatch away a little time to learn. Whatever you can get, you’ll grab.

**A Desire to be a Kollel Man**

Let’s say you have a yearning to become a kollel man. A man told me he would like to be a kollel man; he is thinking of giving up his job and becoming a kollel man.

So, I said to him, “You don’t need to give up your job; on Sunday become a kollel man. You don’t work on Sundays. So, on Sunday morning take along lunch, say goodbye to your wife and don’t come back till Sunday night. You are a kollel man all day long and it won’t harm your parnasa.” That was years ago; he still hasn’t done it!

The answer is, he didn’t want to be a kollel-man; what he wanted was not to work!

**Every Sumday Throughout the Year**

However, if somebody is sincere and he follows this advice, so Sunday he is a kollel man. Which means, January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, all year long – every Sunday he is in the kollel. He doesn’t sit behind the wheel of his car; he is in the kollel every Sunday. And he doesn’t come home till late; every Sunday, all year round.

Now his wife will protest, “What about me?”

Well, does she want to have a kollel husband or not? You have to make up your mind that that’s what you want.

If a person wants, so he begins by becoming a kollel man at night too. He goes out every night to learn.  And after a while Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, “This man wants to spend more time learning Torah so המקבל עליו עול תורה מעבירין ממנו עול מלכות ועול דרך ארץ – they will relieve him of the yoke of working so much for his livelihood.

And it’s surprising, but that’s the truth – you find people people today who spend part of their days every day in the kollel. But this is a zechiyeh that you have to earn by first making use of whatever is available.

*Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor (based on Tape #408 – June 1982 lecture.)*

**The Significance of the Sin**

**Offering to the Jew who**

**Acted Unintentionally**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



As we learn in the Torah portion of Vayikra, a korban chatat (sin offering) must be brought for a sin which is committed unintentionally. A korban asham taluy (trespass offering for doubtful guilt) is brought if the person is not sure that he has committed a sin.

For example: A person was presented with two portions of fat that look alike. After eating one of them he learns that only one portion was kosher; the other was treife, and he is not sure which one he ate. In this instance he is required to bring an asham taluy, for there is no way to determine if a sin was committed.

A korban asham taluy is a more expensive offering than a korban chatat. To explain why:

The purpose of an offering is to arouse a Jew to return to G-d in repentance. If a person is sure that he has sinned, he feels a genuine regret and repents completely. If, however, there is doubt in his mind (as the possibility exists that no sin was really committed), it is much more difficult for him to experience regret and return to G-d with a whole heart. Accordingly, the offering he must bring is more costly than the one he would be required to offer if his sin were a known fact.

These korbanot were brought for sins that were committed unintentionally. At first glance this does not make sense, as it would seem that a person should not be held accountable for an involuntary action. Nonetheless, we see that such a person is obligated to bring an offering, as his soul needs to undergo refinement.

The very fact that a person has come to sin - even unintentionally, without forethought - is proof that his spiritual standing is not what it should be. For if a Jew conducts himself properly he will never transgress, and not even accidentally, as it states, "No evil will happen to the just."

Those things a person does "accidentally," without plan and without intention, are indicative of his essential nature. The actions we perform automatically, without thinking, reflect our true leanings and tendencies. They indicate those areas toward which we are most inclined.

A tzadik (righteous person) naturally performs actions that are good and holy. If, G-d forbid, a person commits a sin, even by "chance," it shows that he derives at least an infinitesimal degree of pleasure from negative things. Thus, a person is required to bring an offering for any sin he commits, even those that are committed without his volition.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5759/1999 edition of L’Chaim.* Adapted from Volume 3 of Likutei Sichot.

**Thoughts that Count for the Parsha**

*And it shall be that when he has sinned and is conscious of his guilt, he shall restore that which he took by robbery* (Lev. 5:23)

Our Sages note that whenever the Torah uses the phrase "And it shall be," it indicates joy and happiness. But what possible joy can there be in a discussion of robbery? Rather, the positive point in this verse is that the robber "is conscious of his guilt." It is a good thing that he recognizes the need to repent of his sin and bring an offering to atone for his misdeed. (Ilana D'Chayei)

*And if he denies unto his neighbor that which was delivered to him to keep, or in pledge, or in something taken by violence...he shall give it to the one it belongs to on the day he confesses his sin* (Lev. 5:21, 24)

The Torah advises the robber to return whatever he stole on the same day that he admits his crime. The longer he waits, the harder it will be for him to give it up. (Maadanei Asher)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5759/1999 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vayikra 5783**



With the beginning of the reading of the book of Vayikra this Shabat in the synagogue, the title of the book itself calls out to us for understanding what is meant when the Torah tells us that G-d called out to Moshe. Moshe experiences a special and unique method of G-dly revelation. The Torah testifies to this by describing that G-d, so to speak, talks to Moshe 'face to face.'

The prophets of Israel receive G-dly communication while in a dreamlike trance. But the thrust of Jewish tradition is that even though there is no longer any type of G-dly prophecy present in our world, G-d still communicates with humans. But, He does so in very subtle means - in reflections of human behavior and world events themselves.

Free will allows humans to behave as they will, yet there is a guiding heavenly hand in world affairs visible to those who wish to see it.  A few decades ago, two scientists won a Nobel Prize for proving their ability to yet hear the echo of the sounds of the original birth of the universe at the moment of its creation. We all know that human hearing is possible only within a limited range of wave frequencies. Judaism preaches that good deeds, moral behavior, Torah observance and loyalty to traditional Jewish values help expand our hearing ability – and this enables us to tune into heavenly sound frequencies which were originally blocked to us.

The auxiliary message of Vayikra, when G-d called out to Moshe, is that Moshe's hearing is so perfectly attuned to heavenly communication, he is always 'face to face' with his Creator. That is the true indication of the greatness of Moshe and makes him the most unique of all the world's prophets, teachers and leaders.

The word Vayikra, as written in the Torah, contains a miniature letter 'aleph.' This indicates to us that G-d's message to us is subtle, quiet, and easy to ignore temporarily, but persistent and ongoing. As the L-rd told the prophet Elijah, 'I do not appear in the great wind or in earthquakes or other terrifying natural phenomena, but rather in a small, still voice.'  Listening to a still, small voice requires good hearing acumen and intense concentration. Casual hearing will not suffice.

In our times, the small 'alef' requires us to really listen and pay attention to what transpires in our personal and national lives. Oftentimes, we, like the prophet Yonah, attempt to flee from the still small voice that continually echoes within us. But it remains persistent, and waits patiently for our hearing ability to improve in our everyday lives.

The Bible teaches us that Shimshon began his career as the savior and Judge of Israel when he was able to hear the spirit of the L-rd beating within his heart. In our busy and noisy lives, with so much incessant sound exploding all around us constantly, we really have little time or ability to listen to our true selves – those small voices  that are always speaking to us. Our inner voice is the medium that Judaism uses to teach us that the L-rd calls out for our attention, to give us moral and courageous guidance. But it can only be of value if we listen - and that requires concentration, thought and commitment.

A great sage once remarked that when a Jew prays to G-d he or she is talking to G-d. But, when a Jew studies Torah then G-d, so to speak, is talking to him or her. That is one of the reasons that Judaism places such a great emphasis on Torah study. As the Talmud says: ‘the study of Torah outweighs all other commandments.’ It is the proven method for attuning to the spiritual frequencies that beat within us. Our Creator constantly calls out to us, and we have to make every effort to improve our hearing and our listening.

Shabbat shalom.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Maos Chittim – An Overview**

**By Rabbi Yair Hoffman**



A prominent Rav once gave the following update to a moshol from the Dubno Maggid:

Imagine for a moment, a wealthy gvir wanting his family to get together. Although a seasoned businessman, our gvir is not so familiar with Travelocity and Orbitz. He gives Chaim, one of his sons in Eretz Yisroel, his credit card to arrange for everyone to come to New York. They will all get together in a luxurious hotel.

Chaim purchases first class bookings for himself, his wife and children. His brother Yaakov and family from Kiryat Sefer were booked on Delta with a 12 hour stop-over. Brother Dovid and family from Beit Shemesh were booked on Ukrainian Airways through Kiev, saving his father thousands of dollars. Shimshi and family were booked on a fabulous deal on Turkish Airlines.

When Chaim’s father went to pick him up from JFK, he asked where everyone else was. Chaim answered, “Well, Yaakov is on Delta, arriving tomorrow, Shimshi is on Turkish Airlines arriving Tuesday night and Dovid will be here Thursday morning from Ukrain-“

“What?? I gave you the credit card so that everyone could come. Instead you booked yourself on First Class so that you could live in luxury while your brothers are struggling on two bit air fares!”

“But Ta, I saved you money!”

“I am reversing the charges on your airfare, Chaim! Pay for those tickets yourself!”

The Dubno Maggid explained that regarding our obligation to give Tzedakah, it is not that we are the owners of our money and we choose to give it to the needy. No. We are mere messengers of Hashem to give this money that He gave us to His other children. When we eat on Yom Tov, but our brethren do not – it is an abuse of the system no different than the moshol expounded above!

Maos Chittim, of course, is providing to those local people who are struggling financially so that they can afford Pesach Matzoh and the other expenses associated with this Yom Tov.

**Questions**

Some questions, of course, arise. What is the source of this custom? Who must give? And who is considered as “struggling financially?” And why only Pesach? Sukkos is also a rather expensive Yom Tov, with lulavim and esrogim commanding a heavy premium, aside from the cost of sukkah panels and schach. Furthermore, is Maos Chittim charity or is it some other obligation?

The custom, at first glance, is not found in Tanach verses, nor the Mishna. It would seem that the original source for this custom is found in the Jerusalem Talmud (Bava Basra 1:4). There, Rabbi Yossi Ben Rabbi Boon states: “Twelve months for Pesach wheat, whether to take or to give.”

With this one statement, according to the commentaries, we have an answer to the first three of our questions. It is a Talmud Yerushalmi, all residents of the town must give to it, and the residency requirement is twelve months. In order to qualify as a local “financially struggling party” there is also a twelve-month residency requirement.

**Residency Requirement**

Is it just a Yerushalmi, however? The Vilna Gaon (Kol Eliyahu Parshas Bo – Shmos 13:6) asks why the verse repeats the obligation to eat Matzah twice and why in the second clause it uses the passive form of eaten rather than the command form of eat. He explains that the passive form indicates that there is an obligation to make sure that each poor person fulfills this Mitzvah.

As far as the residency requirement, the Chok Yaakov (Chapter 429) writes that if the person intends to stay there for twelve months and has signed a lease to that effect, then this too fulfills the residency requirement. The Be’er Heitev states that one merely needs to show that one is staying in the community for over 12 months.

All this brings us to further explore the nature of this obligation.

This Yerushalmi is cited by Rabbi Yitzchok Ben Moshe of Vienna, author of the Ohr Zaruah (Vol. II Chapter 255) and teacher of the Maharam M’Rottenberg. He writes: “It is a custom in all communities to place a tax on the community for the purposes of providing wheat for Matzos for the poor of the city as it states in the Yerushalmi.” The Ohr Zaruah is cited by the Ramah in the Darchei Moshe (OC 429:1)

**Tax Rather than Charity**

We see from the wording of the Ohr Zaruah that it is viewed, in fact, as a tax rather than a form of charity. The juxtaposition of Pesach wheat in tractate Bava Basra alongside the obligation to partake in the building of the city wall is perhaps the Ohr Zaruah’s source for this wording. Rabbi Yair Bacharach in his Mekor Chaim also writes that it is a tax not a tzedaka.

What is the difference as to whether it is a tax or a charity? One difference lies in whether Maaser funds may be used to this end. The Poskim have ruled that Machtzis HaShekel, Matanos L’Evyonim, and Yom Kippur Kaparos Tzedakka cannot be deducted from one’s normal Maaser obligation (See responsa of Maharil Diskin and others cited in Ahavas Chessed by Rabbi Avidan p. 154 for further sources).

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach distinguishes between the obligation of Maos Chittin in older times and nowadays. Back then it was an actual tax where each member of the community was assessed. This no longer is so prevalent and Rav Auerbach ruled that Maaser moneys may be used.

**The Mitzvah Has Changed**

We also see from the sources cited earlier that the original custom was to distribute the wheat itself, and not to distribute ground up flour. It seems that the nature of the Mitzvah has evolved from wheat to flour to Matzos to money. The Mishna Brurah explains that the flour was given because it caused the benefit to be that much closer.

The Mishna Brurah in his Shaar HaTziyun (429:10) explains the reason for the Mitzvah, which answers our final question as to why it is only Pesach and not Sukkos. He writes that since Pesach is the holiday of our freedom where we all sit around and celebrate our freedom in joy it is not kavod Hashem, honor to G-d, that poor people are hungry and thirsty.

Rabbi Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Ohr L’tzion Vol. III 5:2) writes that even in our times, one may actually force members of the community to give to Maos Chittim. Indeed, other meforshim have written that whoever excuses himself from this obligation it is as if he has spilled blood.

All this brings up the question – why is this custom so obligatory in its nature? Isn’t it just an auxiliary aspect of this Yom Tov? There is a fascinating Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu (Shmos chapter 23) which indicates that far from being auxiliary, it lies at the very essence and core of why we were, in fact, redeemed. It states that when we were to leave Egypt they enacted a Bris (Covenant) between themselves that they would always perform acts of chessed toward each other. It is for this reason that they merited redemption, states the Midrash.

A few further thoughts: The Zohar (Zohar Chadash Bereishis 18) understands the statement of Chazal (Rosh Hashana 16a) that on Pesach we are judged on the bounty – the intent is how much charity we have distributed in the past year. Based upon this Zohar the Kav HaYashar (chapter 91) writes that the entire month of Nissan we should contemplate whether we have fulfilled our charitable obligations in light of the blessing that we have received from Hashem.

One last thought: The word “Pesach” is equivalent in Gematria to “Kemach” – flour and also to the word “Yechalek” which means “distribute.”

***Reprinted from the March 19, 2023 website of Yeshiva World News. The author can be reached at****yairhoffman2@gmail.com*

**Another Thought that**

**Counts for the Parsha**

*And the priest shall make atonement for him...for anything of all that he may have done to trespass thereby* (le'ashma ba) (Lev. 5:26)

"Le'ashma ba" is an acronym standing for "La'keil asher shavat mikol hamaasim bayom hashevi'i" - "to G-d, Who rested from all His deeds on the seventh day." This is an allusion to our Sages' dictum that "Whoever keeps the Shabbat properly is forgiven all his sins." Thus, even in exile, when we have no physical Holy Temple in which to offer sacrifices, our observance of Shabbat atones for sins in the same way. (Tiferet Shlomo)

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