

The Parsha Discussion

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Reeh 5779. Milk and Meat. Why Not?



The Torah repeats three times: “Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk.” The third of these instances may be found in our parasha (14:21). But can we understand what the problem is with mixing milk and meat together?

Maimonides felt that there was something irrational here, a divine decree, but not particular fathomable to the human mind (8 Chapters. Chapter 6). Rambam enjoyed quoting the following rabbinic statement which indicates that there is no moral flaw in the desire to eat, say, a cheeseburger:

“Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel said, "A person should not say, 'I could never eat meat and milk together; I could never wear linen and wool clothing in a mixed fabric...' But rather, he should say: 'I do indeed want to, yet I must not, for my father in Heaven has forbidden it'".

In other words, there is no MORAL issue with meat and milk. **It is a divine decree.**

But Ibn Ezra (Ex 23:19) thought that “**this is a path of cruelty.**” By that he means that milk is used by all mammals to grant and sustain life, it is nature’s way of the mother nourishing her offspring. To boil a kid in its mother’s milk is a cruel upturning of the motherly nature. The very substance that nurtures and gives life is being used to cook the very organism that the milk was supposed to nurture! There is something shocking and offensive in this very notion. Halakha, of course has expanded this further, to all meat and milk, and even to poultry, absorbed tastes and all. But, for one, see the fundamental moral logic here quite clearly.

For many years I identified wholly with the Rambam, identifying kashrut as a “chok” – a divine fiat – and I was surprised when I encountered the following passage by a famous American author Cynthia Ozick, who is a halakhically observant Jew. I was taken by how powerfully she experienced the laws of Kashrut, spanning both the theological and social realms:

The separation of *milchik* and *fleishik* [dairy and meat], forks and knives, you might say, has no overt metaphysical importance. It certainly—superficially—suggests triviality...but beyond this, it's a constant reminder of larger ideas.

First of all, it teaches you on a simple, trivial everyday plane, that one thing is not another thing. And so, if you follow that up, you come to a huge, thundering reminder: God is not man. Is there a distinction between the Creator and the created? In other words, this quotidian, humble, knives-and-forks reminder of distinction-making becomes a daily monitor of larger distinctions—so that you will never commit intellectual blurring.

Distinction-making has an intellectual resonance which leads to the heart of monotheism. You are never going to be, you could not become a Christian, if you separate *milchik* from *fleishik*, because you will know that you cannot blur or blend the mind of the human creature with the mind of the Creator, you must not confuse man with God.

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Another reason to value kashrut is that wherever I go, this practice sets me aside as a Jew. It will never be forgotten by me or by anybody else. I was recently a writer-in-residence at a college. Great efforts were made to accommodate me with food. Nobody could forget that I was a Jew because of the fuss over the food, a minor fuss, it wasn't a lot, nevertheless it reminded me—and them.

So, please discuss:

Why do we have the laws of kashrut? Are they:

- A divine ordinance?
- A social divider between Jew and Gentile?
- A moral imperative?

Or ... all three?

Shabbat Shalom!