



WHY SHECHITAH IS IMPORTANT

THE JEWISH PEOPLE TODAY ARE FACING MANY CONFLICTS. ONE OF THESE CONCERNS SHECHITAH, the ritual slaughter of fowls, lamb and beef so that Jews are permitted to eat the meat. Pressure from a number of groups is attempting to ban shechitah, or to impose government laws which would prevent it from being carried out effectively or which would greatly raise the price of kosher meat.

In practical terms, Shechitah is virtually painless for the animal. The special Shechitah knife is honed razor sharp: if it sliced a person's finger he would not feel it. The act of Shechitah generally cuts the carotid arteries, causing immediate cessation of the blood supply to the brain. This is an effective, swift and pain-free stunning procedure. Many contrast this with the fixed bolt form of stunning used in non-kosher slaughter which anti-meat-eating groups describe in very negative terms.

In terms of life in modern society there is another issue: religious tolerance. We live in a pluralist society where freedom for religious practice can be claimed, so long that this does no harm to other human beings. As mature human beings in the 21st century, we can therefore claim acceptance of Shechitah as a human right. Further, attacks on Shechitah are often a disguised form of anti-Semitism: during World War II, Shechitah was banned in all countries under Nazi control.

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@LubavitchUK.com

The real issue is, however, the spiritual question. The Torah, in this week's Sedra¹, commands the Jew to use the method of Shechitah in order to eat meat.

The Torah does not regard meat-eating as something to take for granted. Before Noah, human beings were not permitted to eat meat. Then, in a law given by G-d to Noah after the Flood, meat eating was permitted, but the animal had to be killed first. We understand this law, applying to all humanity, as demanding avoidance of wanton cruelty to animals.

For the Jew, of course, there are further restrictions. Since we are a special people, with a special spiritual task in the world, additional rules apply to us. Only certain animals can be eaten: the 'kosher' animals ('kosher' means fit, suitable). The rules for kosher animals, birds and fish are given in our Sedra². If the animal is unhealthy, again it is forbidden. The word *tref* which we use for non-kosher, literally means 'torn': an animal which has been torn internally and is ill may not be eaten by a Jew³. Our Sedra also tells us that the blood may not be eaten, and meat and milk must be kept separate⁴.

There is more to come! For the Jewish people in the time of Moses, meat could only be eaten when it was part of a sacrifice brought to the Sanctuary. In a sense, the meat is considered sacred. Then, in our Sedra, shortly before entering the Land of Israel, the Jewish people are told that they can eat meat, but only if they slaughter it in a special way⁵. This method was revealed to Moses at Sinai, and is the mode of slaughter used in the Sanctuary and Temple, and by the Jewish shochet (slaughterer) today.

All food, including plants and animals, has within it a spiritual life-force. Chassidic teachings tell us that by a Jew eating permitted food, and serving G-d with the energy it gives him or her, a crucial spiritual cycle is being completed, helping to perfect the universe⁶. This is our global task. The detailed laws and practice of Shechitah help us to carry it out, for the ultimate benefit of all humanity.

1. Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17. 2. Deut. 14:3-21. 3. Exodus 22:30. 4. Deuteronomy 12:23-25; 14:21, as explained by the Sages. 5. Deut. 12:21. See Rashi. 6 See Rabbi Shneur Zalman's Tanya Part I chs.7, 37.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care
SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL

*SEDRA RE'EH***LITTLE JERUSALEM**

The sun was streaming in through the windows of the Synagogue. Benjy was finding it hard to concentrate on the prayers in his prayerbook. Impatiently, he waited for the service to be over, when they would go home to his mother's delicious Shabbat day meal.

Later, as he walked home with his parents and sisters, he sighed. "You know," he said to his father "Just a few weeks ago, we were at the Kotel, the West Wall of the Temple. I found it so easy to pray there - but here, in the Synagogue or at home or school, I can never concentrate on the prayers like I did in Jerusalem."

"Oh, I find it's just as easy to pray here as by the Kotel," Rachel said. "I mean, of course there you feel there it's really special and extra close to G-d, but I think it's possible to achieve the same feelings here."

"I think Rachel is right," their father said. "In fact, in the Sedra they just read now in the Synagogue, Sedra Re'eh, it talks about Jerusalem, how when the Jews settle the Land of Israel they are commanded to build a House for G-d - where they would offer sacrifices up and so on - in 'the place' which G-d will show them. We know this means Jerusalem, so we have a question: why can't it just say

‘Jerusalem’, instead of saying ‘the place’?”

“I don’t know. Why does it?” Benjy asked.

“It’s written like that to teach us a very important lesson. It is true that Jerusalem is the place where the holy Temple stood, and will please G-d be rebuilt one day very soon, and is a very holy place, as Benjy felt when we visited there.

“Nevertheless, even if we’re not in Jerusalem, even not in the Land of Israel at all, we have the power to make any place into something holy.

“How? If, whenever we pray, we pray towards the site of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and we pray to G-d sincerely with all our feeling, that place where we are praying is suddenly considered like a little Temple in Jerusalem.”

“Wow!” Benjy was excited.

“Our synagogue must be a really holy place - people pray there every day. I never realized that before. And I suppose any place, even my bedroom can become like that?”

“Of course! Just try and have the right thoughts, and you can do it. Another way to make your bedroom holy is to make sure you have a kosher Mezuzah on the door, and to have a Tzedaka box in the room.”

Benjy smiled: “Well, I do have a Mezuzah, and it was recently checked by a scribe, so I know it’s kosher. I’ll get an empty cocoa tin and make it into a Tzedaka box, by making a hole in the lid. Every weekday, I’ll put in one penny. So maybe I can call my room ‘Little Jerusalem’. I will make a sign for the door...” he said, happily.

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***