The Meat of The Matter

Part 2

**A Shochet Worthy of His Position:**

In Part 1 of this series, we stated that a “Shu”b” (Shochet and Bodeck) must possess exceptional fear of Heaven in order to be trusted enough to hold this position. The students of the Ba’al Shem Tov were accustomed to do many inquiries to ascertain that a Shu”b was a truly pious person before hiring him. This was in accordance with the Ba’al Shem Tov’s own interpretation of the verse in Chavakuk (3:12): “B’zaa’m Titzad Aretz, With fury You tread the earth”. He explained that the word “B’za’am” is an acronym for “Zevichah, Eruvin, Mikvaos” – the laws of Shechitah, Eruvin and Mikvaos. This indicates that these three things are fundamental aspects of Judaism. For this reason, the Ba’al Shem Tov’s students were very careful about these three matters.

They went so far as to say that when the Yeitzer Hara, evil inclination, wants to seduce an entire city to transgress a prohibition of the Torah, all he has to do is coerce one man – the Shochet – to do his job without piety, which will lead everyone in the town to ingest forbidden foods. As is well known, the Ramban states that forbidden foods is “metamtem es halev v’es hamoach”, stuffs up the heart and brain, and the entire city can thus become ruined spiritually because of the Shochet.

For this reason, the Chasidim would demand that a Shochet uphold a higher spiritual status than the rest of the congregation. For example, he was expected to immerse in a mikveh before slaughtering any animals. A source for this custom is found in the Sefer Ha’Igur (Siman Aleph, Se’if Bais), which cites the opinion of Eldad Hadani from Shevet Dan who writes that this is the accepted custom.

They would also investigate how the Shochet acts in his home to ensure that he was a welcoming person who was kind to guests and was not cruel in his relations with his household members. This is in accordance with the Gemara (Shabbos 156A) that states: “One who is born under the constellation of ‘Ma’dim’ (Mars) will be a person who sheds blood. Rav Ashi says that he will either be a bloodletter, a thief, a Shochet or a Mohel.” This indicates that a Shochet has the trait of cruelty within him, but he keeps it at bay by letting out his inherent characteristic of bloodshed through slaughtering animals. However, if we see that he is not a compassionate person, it stands to reason that he has been unable to restrain his inner-nature of cruelty, and is unworthy of his position.

In this vein, we find many stories in Rabbinic literature that deal with disagreements that arose regarding whether a certain person was fit to serve as a Shochet. There also are many stories regarding leading Rabanim who refused to eat meat in certain cities where they did not trust the local Shochet.

From all of this, we see how important it is for us to attempt to seek out the best kosher certification when purchasing meat in order to ensure we are only consuming meat that was slaughtered by a truly pious Shochet.

**Holes In The Lungs**

Chazal tells us (Chullin 11A) that once an animal has been slaughtered properly, it emerges from its presumed status of non-slaughtered meat and enters the presumed status of being halachically acceptable to consume under the assumption that the majority of animals are free of defects that would render them not-kosher. They then fall under the rule of (Chullin 9A): “Once an animal is slaughtered, it is permitted until it becomes known that it is a treifah.”

According to the letter of the law of the Torah, the rule would be that an animal that was slaughtered properly can be eaten immediately, without any additional investigations as to whether it has any defects that would render it unfit, because the majority of animals do not possess these defects. However, Chazal (see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 39:1) enacted decrees that an animal should not be eaten until the lungs are checked to ensure that there are no holes or punctures that would deem the animal a treifah. This is because even though the majority of animals do not possess such punctures, it still is quite common to find them. Therefore, such holes are known as a “mi’ut hamatzui”, a minority that is common to find, and, in such instances, one should not rely on the majority in when it is possible to check the lungs to ascertain the exact status of this animal.

For this reason, the Rema (ibid 33:9) relates that some people are stringent to also check the skin of the gullet of fattened hens because it is common to find punctures in them. And, for this reason, the later Poskim ruled that any time any area of the animal that would render it not-kosher is found to have a mi’ut hamtzui of treifahs, we must be stringent and check that area. For this reason, we are accustomed to checking the lungs of chickens, the “tzumas hagidin” (place where the sinews meet), and other areas which will be explained in upcoming articles.

**Are Most Animals Kosher?**

Later Poskim have asked how Chazal can say that the majority of animals are kosher when it is evident to see that most animals that are slaughtered are, in fact, triefohs. Many answers are offered to this question. We will just quote one answer, which is related by the Bnei Yissochor (Ma’marei Chodesh Adar, Ma’amar 2, Drush 7). He explains that in days of yore the world was on a higher spiritual level and there was much more spiritual “good”. Therefore, a larger percentage of animals were “good” and worthy to be eaten by Jewish people. In our times, however, most of the spiritual good has left the world, and only a little of this good remains. Therefore, the powers of evil cause most of these good animals to become treif so that Jewish people cannot eat them.

I once visited a large slaughterhouse in the diaspora where many cows were slaughtered every day. I noticed a very unusual thing there. Normally, it is very difficult to find any cows that are completely “glatt kosher” – which means that the lungs are 100% smooth and free of bumps and bruises. On the day that I was in this slaughterhouse, 50 animals arrived from the same ranch. Out of these 50 cows, 49 were found to be completely glatt kosher! I was astounded, and arranged to meet with the rancher to ask him how it could be that his cows all had such smooth lungs – with only one exception. The rancher, on the other hand, was surprised that even one of his cows was found to be not glatt. He told us that he was careful to keep the fields that his animals grazed in totally clean and free of any sharp objects, such as shards of glass, that could damage their lungs. He also was very careful about what he gave them to eat, and ensured that their food was clean and had no stones or the like in it. He went on to explain for over half an hour how he cared for the health of his flocks of animals and made sure they only ate the best foods.

From this story, I clearly saw how correct the words of Chazal truly are. Yes, it is true that the majority of animals are kosher. However, this is only if they are cared for properly and fed the proper foods. The only reason we do not see this today is because our animals are not cared for so well, and therefore do not develop properly.

How are lungs checked? That question will be discussed in Part 3 of this series.