The Meat of the Matter

Part 4

**The Process of Nikkur:**

Once the lungs of an animal have been thoroughly checked and determined to be smooth and completely kosher, the animal can now be declared to have a presumption of kashrus, and its meat may be consumed.

(It should be noted that in South America, Mehadrin certifications are accustomed to examine the stomach as well. This is because in that part of the world the animals often undergo surgical procedures on the stomach, which are not recorded in their health history. This surgical procedure includes puncturing the cow’s belly, which can render the animal a treifah. For this reason, an examination of the stomach is necessary.)

Now that the animal has been deemed kosher, the next step is “nikkur”, removing the parts of the animal that may not be eaten. The parts that must be removed are the blood arteries and the “cheilev”, forbidden fats. Some cheilev is forbidden by the Torah, while others are forbidden by Rabbinic decree. The general rule is that anything that would be forbidden to place on the Mizbeach (altar), during the Bais Hamikdosh’s times is forbidden m’deoraysa. The sages of Chazal added other fats that are also forbidden for various reasons. A common denominator between all forbidden fats is that the minimum amount that would be forbidden to consume is a “k’sorah”, the amount of a wheat kernel.

Because there are many places in the hindquarters of an animal where forbidden fats are found, many upstanding and pious Jews have the custom not to eat any part of it. After shechitah, they hang the animal and cut it in two lengthwise. The two parts are then again cut in two, leaving the animal divided into four equal parts. In most communities today, the two parts that are from the hindquarters are put aside and not sold for kosher consumption.

The holy Shlah cites this custom (Shar Ha’osios, Kedushas Ha’achilah, Os 17), and states: “…It is appropriate for pious people to refrain from eating the hindquarters of an animal unless it is cut apart by a righteous and upright person who is known to be an expert. Even though most people who do nikkur are experts, it is still better to be stringent and not to eat the meat of the hindquarters, since one can make do with the rest of the meat of animals or the meat of fowl, for even a great scholar cannot discern this merely from learning from a sefer.”

**The Gid Hanasheh:**

Another part of the animal in the hindquarters that must be removed prior to consumption is the “Gid Hanasheh” (sciatic nerve). This nerve stretches from the lower back up the spine and spreads out through numerous parts of the meat. Chazal added that the fat that lies upon the Gid Hanasheh is also forbidden, which further establishes that many forbidden nerves and blood vessels located within the meat must be removed. It often occurs that one doing nikkur (known as the Menaker) believes that he has removed all the forbidden parts, but has in fact left behind small remnants of forbidden veins, which can lead to serious possible transgressions. This is another reason why it is preferable not to eat any of the hindquarters.

In the past, it was very difficult to adhere to the stringency of not consuming any of the hindquarters. This was largely because many cities in Europe banned gentiles from purchasing meat slaughtered by a Jew, which rendered it impossible to sell the hindquarters to any non-Jews. The only solution for these communities was to find a Menaker who was a righteous man and was well-versed in the practice of nikkur, and to assign him the job of cutting out the forbidden parts of the hindquarters, as well as the less prevalent forbidden parts of the front quarters. This job would take several hours of hard work just to cut out the forbidden parts of one quarter of the animal.

Today, however, it is very easy to sell the hindquarters to non-Jewish meat companies. Since the demand on the kosher market for meat from the hindquarters is not that great, and cutting out the forbidden parts would be a big hassle, most kashrus agencies choose not to bother doing nikkur on the hindquarters, choosing instead to sell it to non-Jews. This has greatly reduced the commonplace halachic intricacies of nikkur.

Even if the hindquarters are not used, there is still some nikkur that must be done to remove blood vessels and forbidden fats from the front quarters. There also is a dispute amongst the authorities as to where exactly the front quarters should be separated from the hindquarters.

**Next Up, The Salting:**

Once the nikkur is completed, the next step in the koshering process is the salting of the meat. Until the meat is properly salted, it may not be cooked. (It may be permitted to use the meat in a manner in which it is not cooked, such as roasting it over a fire.)

The salting process consists of soaking the meat in cold water for half an hour and then coating it with coarse salt. The salt must come in contact with every area of the meat, and affect it to such an extent that it is too salty to be eaten. The salt must remain on the meat for an hour, while it rests on hollow pallets. The meat must then be rinsed in water three times.

Once the salting process is complete, the meat is finally ready to be eaten. Enjoy!