

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XXXVI: Beha'alotecha (Num. 8:1–12:16)

### Essay 3. The prohibition against non-sacrificial meat

**וַיִּשְׁלַח** לַתַּת טַעַם לְמַה לְאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר דְּנֻקָּא אָסֵר הַקַּב"ה בְּבֶשֶׂר תִּמְנָה, מַה שְּׁלֹא אָסֵר לְדוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים, שְׁמַאֲחַר שָׁזְכוּ לְרֵאוֹת הַקַּב"ה "פְּנִיָּם בְּפְנִיָּם" עַל הַר סִינַי וְלִשְׁמוֹעַ קוֹלוֹ אֵינּוּ מִן הַרְאוּי שְׁיִשְׁלוֹט בְּהֵם רְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה, כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמְרוּ ז"ל שְׁלֹא שְׁלֻטָה בְּהֵם רְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה וְכוּ' וְלִכְּוֹן לֹא רָצָה שְׁיִרְבּוּ בְּאֲכִילַת בְּשָׂר, דְּתַנּוּ "מִרְבָּה בְּשָׂר, מִרְבָּה רְמָה", וְרַק הַתִּיר לָהֶם אֲכִילַת בְּשָׂר הַקִּדְשִׁים שֶׁהוּא דְבָר קְדוֹשׁ וְאֵינּוּ יוֹצֵא לְחִוּלִין, וְכִמוֹ שְׁפָתָבוּ הַמְקַוְּבִלִים שְׁפָל מַה שְּׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל בְּסַעֲוֹדַת מִצְנָה וְכִיּוֹם טוֹב אֵינּוּ נִעְשָׂה רְמָה, וְנָה לֹא שְׁיִיד לְדוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים.

**It is necessary to give a reason why for that generation the Holy One, Blessed be He, forbade the Israelites from eating non-sacrificial meat,<sup>1</sup> which He did not forbid for the future generations. That is, after they merited to see the Holy One, Blessed be He, face-to-face on Mount Sinai<sup>2</sup> and to hear His voice, it was not proper for a worm and maggot to prevail over them. This is as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, that worm and maggot would not prevail over them.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, He didn't want them to increase their eating of meat, for it was taught in a Mishnah that Hillel said, "the more flesh, the more worms."<sup>4</sup> He only permitted to them the eating of meat of the consecrated animals, which was something holy and which did not become profane, as the Kabbalists wrote, that everything that a man eats at a festive meal and on a holiday does not transform into a worm.<sup>5</sup> This restriction was not relevant to the future generations, who had not experienced G-d face-to-face.**

וְעוֹד מִטַּעַם אַחַר נָמִי אָסֵר לָהֶם בְּשָׂר תִּמְנָה שְׁלִפֵי שְׁנַדְבָּקוּ בָּהּ בְּמַעֲמַד הַר סִינַי "וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים" וְכוּ', אָסֵר לָהֶם הַבְּשָׂר כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִתְמַשְׁכוּ אַחַר הַיָּצָר הָרַע, שְׁאֵין אָרִי נוֹהֵם אֶלָּא מִתּוֹךְ קוֹפָה שֶׁל בְּשָׂר.

**Also, from another reason, He also forbade the non-sacrificial meat to them because they had become attached to G-d while standing at Mount Sinai, as it is said, "while you, who held fast to the L-rd, your G-d, are all alive today."<sup>6</sup> He forbade meat for them, in order that**

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, "meat of desire," as opposed to meat of sacrificial animals. Cf. Chullin 16b–17a.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 5:4: "Face-to-face the L-rd spoke to you on the mountain, out of the fire."

<sup>3</sup> Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer 41:17: "Rabbi Pinchas said: All that generation who heard the voice of the Holy One, Blessed be He, on Mount Sinai, were worthy to be like the ministering angels. They did not see any seminal drop in their lifetime, and no lice ruled over them. Upon their death, neither worm nor maggot prevailed over them." Contrast this with the later generations, for which Pirkei Avot 3:1 states: "Where are you going? To a place of dust, of worm and of maggot."

<sup>4</sup> Pirkei Avot 2:7.

<sup>5</sup> Eliyahu de Vidas (1518–87), *Reishit Chochma*, Sha'ar haKedusha, chapter 15.

<sup>6</sup> Deut. 4:4.

they would not be pulled after the evil inclination, for “a lion does not roar [standing] over a basket of straw [from which he derives no pleasure], but [he roars standing] over a basket of meat.”<sup>7</sup>

וזהו דאמרינו במדרש ילקוט על פסוק "מי יאכלנו בשר", וכי מפני שלא היה להם בשר היו מתרעמים, אלא שהיו מבקשים עלילה לפרוש מאחרי המקום. וקשה מה עלילה היו מבקשים ולמה דוקא בשר היו מבקשים עלילה. אלא לפי שהקב"ה לא התיר להם בשר תאונה כדי שלא ישלוח בהם יצר הרע. והם אדרבא היו רוצים ומתאונים לאכול בשר כדי שישלוח בהם יצר הרע, כמו שהתאוו באכילת הקישואין שהקישואים הם מולידים חמריות ועכריות בשכל של בני אדם. ומשום הכי לא רצה הקב"ה שישלחו טעמם במן שהיה להם יצר ונקי, אבל הם היו מבקשים עלילה וכו' והיו רוצים לפרוש מאחרי המקום, שיודעים היו שאיסור הבשר בא להם בהיותם דבוקים בו יתברך במעמד הר סיני.

**This is what is said in Midrash Yalkut Shimoni on the verse, “The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat!’”<sup>8</sup> The Midrash asks, “Is it because they had no meat that they were resentful? Rather, they were only seeking a pretext to separate from following the Omnipresent.”<sup>9</sup> A difficulty is what pretext were they seeking, and why specifically because of non-sacrificial meat were they seeking a pretext? Rather, it was because the Holy One, Blessed be He, didn’t permit them non-sacrificial meat in order that the evil inclination wouldn’t rule over them. They, to the contrary, had wanted and desired to eat meat in order that the evil inclination would rule over them, just as they desired to eat cucumbers,<sup>10</sup> because the cucumbers gave birth to severity and troubles in the intellect of a human being.<sup>11</sup> Because of this, the Holy One, Blessed be He, didn’t want them to taste the taste of *manna*, which was a pure and clean food, but they were seeking a pretext etc., and they wanted to separate from following the Omnipresent, for they knew that the prohibition against meat came to them because of their attachment to Him, may He be Blessed, as they were standing at Mount Sinai.**

ובשבת פרק כל כתבי אמרינו פורענות ראשונה מאי היא "ניסעו מהר ה' ", ואמר ר' תמא בר' חנינא שפרו מאחרי ה', ופרש רש"י בתוך שלוש ימים למסעם התאוו האספסוף תאונה להתרעם על הבשר כדי לרוד בה'. והרמב"ן בפירושו הקשה עליו לפי שהפורענות של תאונה כתובה בפרשה אחר "ויהי העם כמתאננים" וכו'.

**In tractate Shabbat, the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter, entitled, “All sacred writings,”** there is a discussion about two verses Num. 10:35–36 that are bracketed with an inverted *nun*, and which are considered to rightfully belong elsewhere in the Bible. The question arose why these verses were moved here, and one answer is that it was in order to demarcate between the first punishment and the second punishment. **It is said:**

<sup>7</sup> Berachot 32a.

<sup>8</sup> Num. 11:4.

<sup>9</sup> Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 732:1.

<sup>10</sup> Num. 11:5: “We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.”

<sup>11</sup> The word ישאין [kishu'in] is related to קשה [kashah] [“difficult”], and Rashi on Num. 11:5 says that cucumbers are injurious to pregnant women and nursing mothers. However, the translator has not located a connection between cucumbers and harm to the intellect.

What is the second punishment [that appears immediately afterward]? [The verse:] “And the people complained [wickedly in God’s ears, and God heard and became angry, and the fire of God burned in them and it consumed the edge of the camp]” (Num. 11:1). **What is the first punishment?** [The verse:] “**And they traveled from the mountain of G-d** [*me’har Hashem*] for three days” (Numbers 10:33), **and Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, said: That they turned from after G-d** [*me’acharei Hashem*] [and hurriedly fled Mount Sinai].

- Shabbat 116a

**And Rashi explained on this Gemara that within three days of their journey, the riffraff felt a gluttonous craving to complain for meat in order to rebel against G-d. The Ramban, in his explanation questioned this, because the punishment for the craving is written in a different section, viz, Num. 11:1, “The people took to complaining bitterly . . . ”**

וחיז ממה שתיירץ שם הרא"ם, לפי דרכנו אתי שפיר, שענינו סרו מאחרי ה' וענינו שאלת הבשר הוא הכל ענין אהד, שהיו רוצים להתרחק מהקדושה ולהתדבק בנצח הרע ובטומאה. ואינם שתי פורעניות כמו שקחשב שם הרמב"ן ז"ל, אלא "ניהי העם כמתאננים" הוא פורענות אהד והשני הוא "ניסעו מהר ה'" והוא עצמו אותו של האספסוף.

**And apart from what the Re'em<sup>12</sup> explained there, according to our way of understanding it is fine, that the issue of turning away from G-d and the question of the people’s desire for meat is all one issue, that they wanted to distance themselves from holiness and become attached to the evil inclination and to spiritual impurity. There are not two punishments as the Ramban of blessed memory thought there, rather “the people took to complaining bitterly” is one punishment and the second is “And they traveled from the mountain of G-d,” and that itself is the same as the riffraff.**

וניחא שפיר לשון הגמרא לפי דרכו של רש"י ז"ל, דקאמר תחלה פורענות שניה מאי היא והדר מפרש פורענות ראשונה מאי היא וכו' והנה ליה למימר תחלה פורענות ראשונה מאי היא. ומשום הכי הפסיק הענין בין אלו הפורעניות באות הנו"ן, לפי שרצו להתרחק מנו"ן של הקדושה ולהדביק בנו"ן של הנצח הרע דהיינו נחש הקדמוני, ולכן הן נוגיין הפוכות או מנוזרות.

**The language of the Gemara is very convenient according to the way of understanding of Rashi of blessed memory, saying first “what is the second punishment,” and then explaining “what is the first punishment.” It should have said first, “what is the first punishment.” Because of that, the matter between these punishments was separated by the letter *nun*, having a Gematria of 50, because they wanted to distance from the *nun*, the 50<sup>th</sup> level, of holiness and to become attached to the *nun*, the 50<sup>th</sup> level, of the evil inclination,<sup>13</sup> which is the primordial serpent that seduced Eve, and therefore there are the letters *nun* that are reversed or differentiated.**

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c. 1455 – c. 1526) (“Re'em”), Talmudist, posek, and mathematician, best known for *Sefer ha-Mizrahi*, a supercommentary on Rashi’s commentary on the Torah.

<sup>13</sup> The Kabbalists teach of 50 gates, or levels, of wisdom [binah], as well as 50 levels of spiritual impurity. For example, see Chaim ibn Attar (1696–1743), Moroccan Kabbalist and Talmudist, *Or ha’Chaim*, Ex. 3:8.

ומה שאמרו "ועתה נפשנו יבשה אין כל בלתי אל-המן עינינו", אמרינו בפרק מפנין דמי שהקזיז דם אותו היום צריך לאכול בשר ולשתות יין, בשר משום נפשא חלף נפשא, יין משום סומקא חלף סומקא. ולכן אמרו ישראל כשאנו מוצאים עצמנו ש"נפשנו יבשה" מרוב טורח הדירה או מחמת דבר אחר, התקנה יומר טובה היא לאכול בשר משום נפשא חלף נפשא. ו"אין כל" כלומר אין לנו כל צרכי הסעודה הצריכה לנו, שאין לנו בשר. ואם תאמר שאנו טועמים במן כל מיני טעם והמן לבדו יספיק, הלא על היין לא יספיק דבעינו סומקא דוקא והמן אדרבא הוא לבן, וזהו "בלתי אל-המן עינינו".

Regarding what they said, **“Now our souls are shriveled; there is nothing at all; nothing but this *manna* to look to,”**<sup>14</sup> it is said in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Shabbat entitled, **“One may move,”** that one who undergoes bloodletting needs to eat meat and drink wine the same day, **“meat because a soul replaces a soul,”** i.e., the meat from the animal replenishes the person’s strength, and **“wine because [the] red replaces [the] red,”** i.e., the red wine assists in the replenishment of the person’s blood.<sup>15</sup> **Therefore, Israel said, when we exert ourselves such that “our souls are shriveled” from the exertion of the way or because of some other matter, the better solution is to eat meat, because “a soul replaces a soul.”** Also, **“there is nothing,”** as if to say that we don’t have the necessities of the meal that we need, that we do not have meat. **If you will say that we taste in the *manna* all manner of tastes and that the *manna* alone will suffice, isn’t it the case that the wine won’t suffice, because we specifically want wine, and to the contrary, the *manna* is white,<sup>16</sup> and this is the meaning of “nothing but this *manna* to look at.”**

ולפי האמת לא שייך ביה נפשא חלף נפשא ולא סומקא כלל, וזהו שפרש רש"י "בין-פארן ובין-תפל ולבן", הוכיחו על הדברים שתפלו על המן, שהוא לבן. והטעם שהזכיר חטאם במה שתפלו על המן שהוא לבן דוקא, יש לומר דבפרק י"ג דכתובות אמרינו טוב המלבין שינים להבירו יותר ממשקהו חלב. והמלבין שינים רצה לומר שגומן לו מועט בסבך פנים יפות, והואיל שבקאן הקב"ה נט[ו]ן להם בסבך פנים יפות לכן הנה לבן לרמוז על זה ואף על פי כן תפלו עליו דברים.

**In truth, “a soul replaces a soul” and wine is not relevant at all here, and this is as Rashi explained** on “These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan—through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, **between Paran and between Tophel, and Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab**”<sup>17</sup>:

R. Yochanan said: We have gone through the whole Bible and we have found no place the name of which is Tophel or Laban! But the meaning is that **[Moses] reproved them because of the words by which they defamed** [טפלו] **[taphlu] the *manna*, which was white** [לבן] [*lavan*] in color . . .

- Rashi on Deut. 1:1

<sup>14</sup> Num. 11:6.

<sup>15</sup> Shabbat 129a.

<sup>16</sup> Ex. 16:31: “The house of Israel named it *manna*; it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers in honey.”

<sup>17</sup> Deut. 1:1.

The reason that [Moses] remembered their sin in which they defamed the *manna*, and specifically because it was white, it can be said that in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Ketubot it is said by Rabbi Yochanan, “The one who whitens his teeth to his friend [by smiling at him] is better than one who gives him milk to drink.” “The one who whitens his teeth” means to say that he gives [his friend] somewhat of “a pleasant countenance,”<sup>18</sup> and since here the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave them a pleasant countenance, therefore [the *manna*] was white in order to hint this, nevertheless they made defamatory statements.

ועליהם אמר הכתוב "רב־אכל גיר ראשים ויש נספה בלא משפט", דקשה מהו "ויש נספה", דאם שייד לרישיה דקרא הנה לו לומר "ונספה בלא משפט", ומדקאמר "ויש", נראה שהיא ענגן אחר ואיד מתקשר בראש הפסוק.

About them, the Scripture said, “The fallow ground of the poor yields much food; but there is substance swept away without justice.”<sup>19</sup> The difficulty is what is this “but there is substance”? If it is relevant to the beginning of the verse, it should have said, “The fallow ground of the poor yields much food, but it is swept away without justice.” Since it said, “there is substance,” it appears that there is a different matter, and how is it connected to the beginning of the verse?

ויובן במאי דאיתא בחושן משפט (סימן שצ"ג סעיף ב') הכניסן שלא ברשות ואכלתן בהמתו של בעל הבית והזקה באכילתו, בעל הפירות פטור, דאיבעי לה שלא תאכל. ומשום הכי אמר "ויש", שדינו בבהמה שפבר יש לה זה הדיו, שפינו שאוכל יותר מדאי עד שהזנק באכילתו הוא "נספה בלא משפט" מפני שהיה לו שלא יאכל.

This will be understood by what is brought in the Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat (siman 393, se'if 2), “If the person brought produce [into a courtyard] without permission, and an animal belonging to the owner of the courtyard ate it and suffered injury because it ate it, the owner of the produce is not liable, because the animal should not have eaten it.”<sup>20</sup> Because of this, it says “but there is substance,” that its law is like the animal that already had this judgment, that since it ate more than was appropriate until it was injured from its eating, it is “swept away without justice,” because it should not have eaten.

ובדרב זה יובן הכתוב "יאכלו עגוים וישבעו יהללו ה' דרשיו" וכו', דקשה מה ענגן זה לזה. ויש לומר שאמרו ז"ל שאין יצר הרע שולט באדם אלא מתוך אכילה ושתיה. וכן פתיב "פן־תאכל ושבעת" וכו' "נרם לבבך ושכחת את־ה' אלהיך". וכשאכל אדם ושבוע יש לחוש פן יגבר עליו היצר וישכח את ה'.

In this way the Scripture will be understood, “Let the humble eat and be satisfied; let all who seek the L-rd praise Him; may your hearts live forever!”<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to understand

<sup>18</sup> Pirkei Avot 1:15.

<sup>19</sup> Prov. 13:23.

<sup>20</sup> This is also in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, Damages to Property 3:14.

<sup>21</sup> Ps. 22:27.

what one thing, i.e., the humble eating, has to do with another, i.e., seeking and praising G-d? Also, what is the significance of the ending blessing, “may your hearts live forever”?

**It can be said that [the rabbis] of blessed memory said that the evil inclination only rules over a man while eating and drinking.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, it is written, “When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the L-rd, your G-d.”<sup>23</sup> When a man has eaten and he is satisfied, there is a fear lest his evil inclination get the best of him and he forget G-d.**

אֲמָנָם אָמְרוּ הַמְּקוּבָּלִים שְׂאִין בְּכָל הַמַּדּוֹת הַטּוֹבוֹת יוֹתֵר הַשּׂוֹבֵה מִהַעֲנָנָה וּכְדֹאֲמַרִּינָן בְּפֶרֶק קַמָּא דְעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה עֲנָנָה גְדוּלָּה מִכָּל דְּכִתִּיב "יַעַן מְשַׁח" וְכוּ' "לְבַשָּׁר עֲנָוִים", צְדִיקִים וְחַסִּידִים לֹא נֹאֲמַר אֱלֹא "עֲנָוִים". וְהַטַּעַם הוּא לְפִי שֶׁהַעֲנָנָה מִחֲלִישׁ כַּחוֹ שֶׁל יֵצֵר הָרַע, שֶׁעֲנָנָה בְּגִימְטְרִיא סְמָא"ל, וְאִין לֹא פֶחַ לְהַחֲטִיא, וְאִם כֵּן מִי שֶׁהוּא עֲנָו יָכוֹל לְאָכּוֹל וְלִשְׁבּוֹעַ וְאִין פְּחַד שְׂיִתְגַּבֵּר עָלָיו הַיֵּצֵר וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת ה', אֱלֹא אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֲכַל וְשָׂבַע יִהְיֶה יָכוֹל לְהִלָּל אֶת ה' וְלִקְרוֹשׁ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּחֵהוּ, וְזֶהוּ "יַחֲזִי לְבַבְכֶם לְעַד", שֶׁאֲחַר שֶׁאֲכַל וְשָׂתָה, יֵשׁ לוֹ שְׂמֵי לְכַבוֹת אֶבֶל הָרַע נַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ טוֹב.

But this fear does not exist for one who is truly humble. **Indeed, the Kabbalists said that among the best character traits, nothing is greater than humility.<sup>24</sup> Also, as it says in the first chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah (20b), “humility is greater than all, as it is written, ‘because the L-rd has anointed me, to announce good news to the humble.’<sup>25</sup> It doesn’t say ‘[the] righteous and pious,’ rather ‘the humble.’ ”**

**The reason for this is because humility weakens the power of the evil inclination, for the gematria of “humility” is 131, the same as that of “Samael,” the angel of death, and he has no power to make [the humble person] sin. If so, one who is humble is able to eat and to be satiated and has no fear that the evil inclination will get the better of him and that he will forget G-d. Rather, even though he ate and was satiated, he will be able to praise G-d and to seek Him and not to forget Him. This is the meaning of “may your hearts live forever,” that after [the humble person] ate and drank, he has two hearts. This alludes to the verse, “You shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your hearts,”<sup>26</sup> which Berachot 54a explains means “with your two inclinations, with your good inclination and your evil inclination.” Thus, even though eating and drinking may lead an average person to sin, a truly humble person is not at risk, **and his evil heart has become a good heart for him.****

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<sup>22</sup> Zohar I:110a (Vayera 21:318).

<sup>23</sup> Deut. 8:12–14.

<sup>24</sup> Moshe Cordovero (1522–70), *Tomer Devorah* (Venice 1588), chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 61:1.

<sup>26</sup> Deut. 6:5.