

Hold That Garbage

By Rabbi Joshua (frugally known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

In memory of Marta bas Binyamin, who passed away last Motzaei Shabbos at the age of ninety-nine. May her memory be a blessing.

In this week's parsha, we are commanded, " And you shall be people of holiness unto me ; and flesh in the field that has been torn (treifa) you shall not eat, you shall throw it to the dog" (Shemos 22 : 30). As mentioned by Rashi, Onkeles explains this verse to be dealing with 'eiver min hachai,' flesh torn from an animal while it is still alive. The Torah forbids such flesh not only to a Jew, but to a non - Jew, a ben Noach, as well. The Rambam, in his Laws of Forbidden Foods, 4 : 6, explains that it refers to an animal that has received a wound that will eventually cause it to die. The oral law, as the Rambam elaborates, has explained the term 'treifa' to refer, halachically, to an animal that has a condition which will cause it to die within twelve months. Treifa according to this definition is forbidden only to a Jew, and permitted for a non - Jew. Rabbi Nathan Adler, in his work on Onkeles, Nesina LeGer, points out that this divergence was already noted by Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto in his work on Onkeles, Ohaiv Ger.

No matter how we explain the term treifa in our verse, it seems a bit strange that with all the many mitzvos we are presented with in our parsha, it is specifically in regard to the mitzvos in this verse that we are told to be holy people. If we were asked to choose a mitzvoh in our parsha that symbolizes holiness, we would probably think of many other verses before this one. For example, in the realm of mitzvos between man and man, we are commanded in this parsha to lend money to a friend in need, and in the realm of mitzvos between man and God, we are commanded to bring sacrifices to the Temple. Wouldn't these mitzvos be better representatives of holiness? Why then are the halochos of treifa chosen for this purpose?

One answer to our question could be simply that what we take into our system does, indeed, have much to do with holiness. Ramban says that the animals and fowl which the Torah forbids us have bad character traits, and when taken into our system can effect us detrimentally - however his comments need to be understood. More generally, holiness, as the Ramban says, relates to how conduct our everyday lives. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, pointed out that the Rambam's Book of Holiness contains only three subheadings : Laws of Forbidden Relationships, Laws of Forbidden Foods, and Laws of Slaughtering. It is specifically within the realm of the mundane that we are to strive for holiness. Thus, refraining from eating treifa is part of this process. However, I would like to focus on the second half of the verse in order to answer our question.

The Torah tells us that we should throw the treifa to the dog. Why? Rashi says that even though it can also be given to a non - Jew (unlike Onkeles' opinion previously cited by Rashi), the dog deserves it as a reward, because when the Jews left Egypt, the dogs did not bark at them. Perhaps these were attack dogs that were trained to bark at slaves or unfamiliar people, and yet they were silent as the Jews left the country. As a reward for not disturbing them, we are told to give them our treifa meat, even though it is really permissible to a non - Jew. This teaches us, says Rashi, that God does not deprive any creature of its just reward. Thus, our verse teaches us the trait of gratitude, which, as the Chovos Halevovos says, is the foundation of our service of God. By inculcating this trait within ourselves, we are setting ourselves upon the path of attaining holiness.

Accepting Rashi's explanation of expressing gratitude to the dog, but following Onkeles' explanation of treifa, I feel that there is an even more compelling reason to see our verse as a symbol of being holy. According to Onkeles, the treifa has no human use at all. Not even a non - Jew is allowed to eat it. Our initial instinct would be to just throw it in the garbage. Instead the Torah tells us to wait a moment. That piece of meat, that you think is garbage, is really the avenue for a mitzvoh. You can use this seemingly worthless piece of material to express gratitude to a creature who benefited you, and in that way inculcate within yourself a very important character trait, that will lead you to serve God properly. In a similar way, every situation in life, no matter how unimportant we may think it is, carries within it the potential to sanctify God's name. There is nothing small or trivial in life, if we look

at it with the proper perspective. I believe that this is the idea behind using our verse as a representative of holiness.

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