



10

Shema Israel

Bible Correspondance Course

Eating and Drinking

What is Truth?

A strange question perhaps, yet one that expresses both our confusion and our skepticism regarding truth. Confusion, because with a multiplicity of religions and a diversity of beliefs around us we may genuinely wonder, “*Where is the truth?*” Skepticism, for it suggests that truth does not exist; in fact, there really is no objective truth.

The Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, answers the question clearly. “*Hashem, God is the truth*” (Jeremiah 10:10; literal translation). For the Bible then, truth does exist; truth *is* association with God Himself. In fact, truth, *Emeth*, in the Hebrew language, is one of the 13 attributes of God. It falls seventh in the list in the exact center of the 13 attributes listed in Exodus 34:6; literal translation, a passage that is recited in the liturgies of Rosh Ha-Shanah Yom Kippur (Jewish New Year, Day of Attonement).

If truth is identified with God’s character, it does not come from us but is to be found outside of us – in God. This recognition implies that in order to find the truth we should not approach it with the preconceived idea that we know what the truth is. Instead, we should approach the truth with a question, “*What is it?*” This is the very same question, in fact, the ancient Israelites asked when confronted with the *manna*, the bread of God in the wilderness. “*What is it?*” they asked, and the question gave the name to this heavenly bread, for the Hebrew word *manna* means “*What is it?*” The meaning of the word *manna* suggests an important lesson regarding how we should approach Biblical truth. We should approach it with the question: “*What is it? What is truth?*” We should approach it with the same humble and honest mindset as the ancient Israelites approached the *manna* in the wilderness, asking “*What is it?*” Asking the question from this frame of reference no longer suggests confusion or skepticism. Instead, it implies sincere questioning from one who expects a true answer from above.

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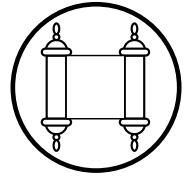
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Bible Study – Lesson # 10*

Eating and Drinking

“The preservation of health is one of the godly ways” (Yod 4).



notes

Eating and Drinking with God

It is striking to see that at each stage of Revelation humans have been tested regarding their commitment to God by their submission to dietary laws. The only commandment Adam and Eve received in the Garden of Eden was in reference to food. When Noah went out of the Ark, he was forbidden to consume blood. Because of their intimacy with the sacred, Jewish priests were required to abstain from any alcoholic drinks. Later at Sinai, the Israelites received through Moses a series of dietary laws concerning clean and unclean animals.

Biblical religion, whether it concerns ordinary daily life or the high moments of a Jewish festival, is marked with food and drink, or sometimes with fasting or abstinence. The lesson is first of all religious. Through these laws the meal becomes a Mizwah, the table stands out as an altar and God is closer to humans. As they eat and drink to sustain themselves, they realize that they owe their biological existence to their Creator. The lesson is also ethical. These restrictions teach men and women to discipline themselves, respect life, dominate their persons and submit their bodies and appetites to the Spirit. But beyond religion and ethics, these laws contain a lesson about the nature of humankind. Eating and drinking and the health of our body are

spiritual requirements.

** Unless otherwise noted, all scripture verses are taken from the New International Reader's Version of the Bible, Copyright 1998, by the Zondervan Corporation.*

1. What is the ideal diet given by God at Creation for humankind?

Then God said, "I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that bears its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food" (Genesis 1:29).

- The rabbis saw in this passage the clear implication that "the first man was not allowed to eat meat" (Talmud *b. Sanhedrin* 59b).

2. What will be the diet of the "world to come" according to the Hebrew prophets?

Cows will eat with bears. Their little ones will lie down together. And lions will eat straw like oxen (Isaiah 11:7). (cf. Isaiah 65:25; Hosea 2:18)

3. Were there other occasions in the ancient history of Israel when God tried to put His people on an exclusive vegetarian regime?

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. He said, "I will rain down bread from

heaven for you. The people must go out each day. Have them gather enough bread for that day. Here is how I will put them to the test. I will see if they will follow my directions (Exodus 16:4). (cf. Numbers 11:7-8)

4. Is vegetarianism in line with Jewish tradition?

- Certainly, for it is attested to and recommended in the Bible as the highest ideal (see above). It is also the most convenient or sure way to avoid prohibited food (see below). A good number of famous Jews were vegetarians—to name just a few among contemporaries: the first Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel, the late Abraham Isaac Kook; the more recent Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Shlomo Goren; two winners of the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature, S. Y. Agnon and Isaac Bashevis Singer; the spiritual mentor of the Zionist Movement, A. D. Gordon. “Jewish Vegetarian Societies” are present in many places all over the world including Israel which counts about 100,000 vegetarians, nearly 4 percent of the population.

- Rabbi Yohanan said: “Rab came from a healthy stock and retained his health by eating vegetables.” (*Hullin*, 84)

5. How can we reconcile the vegetarian statement of Genesis 1 with God’s permission to eat animal flesh after the flood?

“But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it” (Genesis 9:4).

- According to ancient sages, it is because the earth had become “corrupt . . . and filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11) that God allowed the consumption of meat. A common sense answer: simply because after the flood, vegetables and fruit were temporarily not available.

6. What kinds of animals were humans allowed or forbidden to eat?

“You can eat any animal that has hoofs that are separated completely in two. But it must also chew the cud” (Leviticus 11:3).

Land: Animals that do not fill all these requirements such as the pig (Leviticus 11:7) or the rabbit (Leviticus 11:6) were prohibited.

Water: ‘Many creatures live in the water of the oceans and streams. You

can eat all of those that have fins and scales' (Leviticus 11:9).

Air: Leviticus 11:13-19 and Deuteronomy 14:12-18 gives a list of forbidden birds, many of them are birds of prey. On the basis of these two lists, the Talmud gives the names of 24 prohibited birds (*Hul.* 63b).

- The dietary laws of *kosher*, which distinguish between clean and unclean meats is reminiscent of Genesis 1. Indeed, the language of Leviticus 11 which records these laws uses the same technical words and stylistic expressions (beasts of the earth, creeping animals, after its kind, etc.). Furthermore, the listing of the animals follows the same sequence as in Genesis 1:24-26 (the sixth day of creation).
- “Hoofed feet were given as a sign of a grazing animal, as claws identify an animal that seizes its prey. Carnivores were deemed unfit or unclean,” comments Soler, because such an animal “has itself consumed meat and killed other animals in order to do so. . . . If man were to eat them, he would be doubly unclean.” Thus, the restriction of meat-eating to the flesh of grazing animals only, may

be seen as a step toward vegetarianism (*Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition*, p.23).

7. What reasons have been given to justify the dietary laws?

“I am the Lord. I brought you up out of Egypt to be your God. So be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45).

Other underlying motivations have been suggested in Jewish traditions:

- Spiritual reasons: because unclean meats would obstruct human intelligence (*Yoma* 39a).
- Ethical reasons: to help refine moral conduct, such as obedience and self control (*Gen. Rabbah* 44:1) or even compassion (Kook).
- Health or hygiene reasons: (Moses Maimonides).

8. What additional restriction is required when eating clean meat?

“Suppose someone eats meat that still has blood in it. It does not matter whether he is an Israelite or an outsider. I will turn against him if he eats it. I will cut him off from his people” (Leviticus 17:10-11).

- This prerequisite is totally absent in the ancient Near East and is enjoined on all men.

9. Why was it forbidden to eat blood?

notes

“You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it” (Genesis 9:4 JPS TNK). (cf. 1 Samuel 14:33-34; Ezekiel 33:25-26)

- The emphasis on the sacredness of life in the context of Genesis 9:4 (see vv. 5-7) as one prepares to eat meat suggests again the Biblical intention to discourage the consumption of meat. Also, the laws of *kashrut* further discourage the eating of meat by surrounding this act with rules (*shehita*, “salting”) and prohibitions.

10. What is the Biblical position regarding the use of alcoholic beverages?

Don't look at wine when it is red. Don't look at it when it bubbles in the cup. And don't look at it when it goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a poisonous serpent. Your eyes will see strange sights. Your mind will imagine weird things (Proverbs 23:31-32). (cf. Proverbs 20:1)

- On this Biblical passage, the Talmud quotes Rabbi Isaac's humorous comment: “Do not look upon the wine which reddens the face of the wicked in this world, and makes him

pale (with shame) in the world to come” (*Sanhedrin* 70a).

11. What is the lesson contained in the first stories of the consumption of wine recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures?

He drank some of its wine. It made him drunk. Then he lay down inside his tent without any clothes on. Ham saw his father’s naked body...Ham went outside and told his two brothers (Genesis 9:21-22). (cf. Genesis 19: 31-32)

- The very fact that this first consumption of an alcoholic drink was associated with immorality suggests from the start the Biblical idea of abstinence. The ancient rabbis warned against the potential immorality present in the consumption of alcohol. The Midrash quotes Rabbi Isaac saying, “Drinking wine causes the evil inclination to be awakened within a person” (cited in Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, *Talmudic and Midrashic Exegetics on Wine and Strong Drink in Hebrew and English* [Detroit, MI: 1923], 53.)

12. What class of Israelites had to abstain from drinking alcohol?

Then the Lord spoke to Aaron. He said, "You and your sons must not drink any kind of wine when you go into the Tent of Meeting. If you do, you will die. That is a law that will last for all time to come. You must be able to tell the difference between what is holy and what is not. You must be able to tell the difference between what is "clean" and what is not (Leviticus 10:8-10).

- From this verse, the rabbis of the Talmud concluded that the priests had to be *totally* and *always* abstinent from any alcoholic beverage: "May not one be permitted to draw the deduction that it is forbidden to drink wine and strong drink only when in the act of entering the tabernacle of the congregation, but it is permissible to drink before entering the tabernacle," following verse, "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean' (Leviticus 10:10), does not allow such a deduction" (*Bava Metria* 90b).

13. Is it consistent to keep *kosher* and indulge oneself in habits that are dangerous to one's health?

“Set yourselves apart for me. Be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Obey my rules. Follow them. I am the Lord. I make you holy” (Leviticus 20:7).

- On that matter, Rabbi Zalman Schachter comments: “There is a painful incongruity in the idea of a *halakhic* authority inhaling deeply on a cigarette as he ponders a question of *kashrut*. Can a substance at the same time be *kosher* and dangerous to health?” (Louis A. Berman, *Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition* [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982], XVI).

14. What *halakha* (traditional rule) has been referred to against the usage of tobacco?

“Keep thy soul diligently” (Deuteronomy 6:9, JPS). Literal translation – Preserve your life.

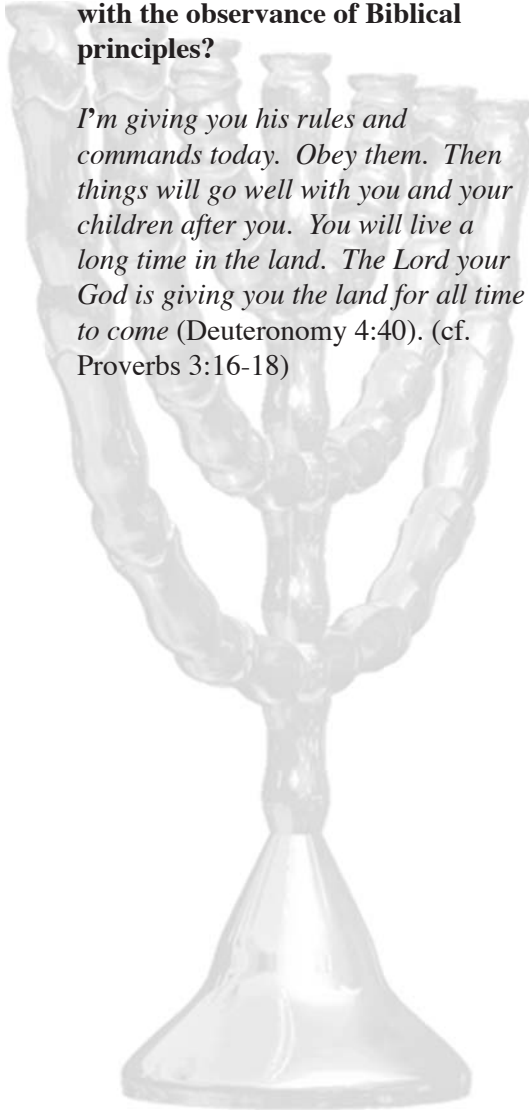
- On the basis of the *halakha*: “You should preserve your life” (Deut. 6:9). Rabbi Ovidia Yosef, chief rabbi of Israel, decreed that the use of tobacco should be forbidden (Hervé Aarone Mimoun, *Notions de Santé et de*

*prévention dans la Tradition
Hébraïque* [Sarcellas, France:
Otsar, 1985], 87).

notes

15. What divine promises are associated with the observance of Biblical principles?

I'm giving you his rules and commands today. Obey them. Then things will go well with you and your children after you. You will live a long time in the land. The Lord your God is giving you the land for all time to come (Deuteronomy 4:40). (cf. Proverbs 3:16-18)



*Eating is Holy*¹

“Eating can be holier than fasting,”² writes Martin Buber. Because the God of Israel is the God of Creation, eating is indeed an important part of our response to Him. It is, therefore, our duty to eat and drink so that we remain alive and thus testify to the living God. It is also our duty to *enjoy* eating and drinking, because this act is the best expression of our thankfulness to the One who gave us food. This is just a matter of elementary politeness. To enjoy eating and drinking is to say “yes” to Creation and show our appreciation for God’s gift. The religion of Israel is not a religion of asceticism such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or a certain Christianity which refuses to eat and drink because they believe that by so doing they will draw closer to their God. The God of the Bible defines Himself as the God of life, the God of all flesh. In fact, only the one who eats and drinks can worship the Lord. “*Eyn kemah ein Torah, eyn Torah ein kemah,*” says the Talmud: “No flour no *Torah*, no *Torah* no flour.” In other words, spiritual values will not be found apart from the physical act of eating and drinking. It is noteworthy that the first time the word “give” (*natan*) is used in the Bible it is relation to the food that God “gave” to mankind: *Then God said, “I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that bears its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food (Genesis 1:29).*

¹ Jacques Doukhan, “Eating is Holy,” *Shabbat Shalom*, Spring-Summer 1999, 18-22.

² Martin Buber, *Hassidism and Modern Man*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman, intro. Martin S. Jaffee (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 32-33.

This is why in the Bible eating is an integral part of religious life. Every religious manifestation, every ritual, every Jewish festival is in one way or another related to eating and drinking. Still today in Jewish families, the meal is marked by prayer. In Jewish tradition, the table is viewed as an altar. Before we begin the meal, we season the *hallah* bread with salt as a reminder of the ancient sacrificial offering (Leviticus 2: 13). The New Testament carries the same religious association with food. Yeshua who shares the bread with his disciples sanctifies the meal and enjoins his followers to do the same. From that moment, his disciples will remember the lesson and repeat the “Lord’s supper.” In this tradition also, eating and drinking has become an important religious matter.

The Original Diet

Now, if indeed, “eating and drinking is holy,” we cannot eat indiscriminately without thinking. Acute awareness of God’s involvement in this everyday act of human existence obliges men and women to think about what they eat. This is why the Bible goes so far as to prescribe a special diet in tune with the God of heaven. Because He is the God of Creation, the God of life, He expects that humans follow a diet that preserves life. Therefore, the same vegetarian principles govern both human and animal behavior: *“I am giving every green plant to all of the land animals and the birds of the air for food. I am also giving the plants to all of the creatures that move on the ground. I am giving them to every living thing that breathes”* (Genesis 1:30). The sacredness of

life is thus affirmed from the very beginning in the most fundamental act of biological life.

At the time of Creation, death was not yet a part of life. Man, woman, and animals were still in a non-threatening environment. It was still a time when everything was “good” (1: 10, 12, etc.) and even “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The world was “not yet” affected by evil and death. It was only when the first man and woman decided to depart from the way “commanded” (*tsawah*) by God that suddenly a new perspective loomed: “...*You can be sure that you will die*” (Genesis 2:17). Isn’t it significant that the first commandment, the first *mitzwah*, given by God to man concerns food. According to the Bible, the very question of the destiny of mankind and ultimately of the world has been played out over the matter of eating.

The Biblical record tells us about the first death; the slaughter of an animal (Genesis 3:21), quickly followed by the first murder (Genesis 4). A few chapters later, the trend reaches its climax in the dramatic picture of human wickedness in its fullness: *The earth was very sinful in God’s eyes. It was full of mean and harmful acts* (Genesis 6:11). In response, God sends the flood; the earth is covered with water and temporarily the soil cannot produce vegetables, or fruit.

The Compromise of God

God then makes a compromise with the survivors of the flood. He adds meat to the original vegetarian regime (Genesis 9:3). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook argued that it is human corruption and

violence that led God to that compromise.³ According to the ancient rabbis, permission to eat meat was nothing but “a concession to human weakness.”⁴ As a result, the ecological balance was affected and the relationship between mankind and animals changed. In the Biblical Creation story, man had dominion over the animals (Genesis 1: 28); now, it was the fear and dread of man that marked their relationship. “*All of the land animals will be afraid of you. All of the birds of the air will fear you. Every creature that moves along the ground will fear you*” (Genesis 9:2). This mention of the change already suggests the Biblical attitude towards eating meat. It receives a negative connotation.

Meat Without Blood

This is immediately confirmed by the following restriction: “*But you must not eat meat that still has blood in it*” (Genesis 9:4). It is noteworthy that this restriction is totally absent in the rest of the ancient Near East. However, good health reasons may explain this Biblical precaution. From medieval physician Maimonides to contemporary scientist H. Baruk, many medical scholars have shown the dangerous effect of the consumption of blood for it contains all the toxins of the animal. But health is not the reason given by the Bible. The Biblical principle underlying this restriction is the sacredness of life, because “*life is in the blood.*” It is also significant that right after this verse the Biblical text associates this restriction with a curse:

³ Louis A. Berman, *Vegetarianism and the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982), 8.

⁴ Abraham Isaac Kook, *Garments of Light: A View as to the Reasons for the Commandments* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 318.

“You can be sure that I will hold someone accountable if you are murdered. I will even hold animals accountable if they kill you” (Genesis 9:5). Furthermore, the text concludes with a most dramatic warning that concerns the killing of man: *“Anyone who murders man will be killed by man”* (Genesis 9:6). Ultimately, the image of God, God Himself, is affected in this process: *“That is because I have made man in my own likeness”* (Genesis 9:6). The idea of sacredness of life receives the stamp of God. Eating an animal with its blood is associated with the worst ethical iniquity, the killing of man, and even the worst religious iniquity, the killing of God. No wonder the prophet Ezekiel associates the act of eating meat with its blood, with idolatry and murder (Ezekiel 33:25-26). The same lesson of the sacredness of life is behind another dietary restriction: *“Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk”* (Exodus 23:19). Besides probable health reasons, as well as, cultural reason prohibiting fertility cults, there are also ethical reasons against the cruelty of associating the dead kid with the milk of its mother. But this principle contains yet another lesson: *the dead animal should not be associated with the source of its life—the milk of its mother*. Just as we should not eat meat (a dead body) with the blood that is supposed to give it life, we should not eat meat with the milk that is supposed to give it life. Likewise, the prohibition not to eat *“the meat attached to the inside of the hip”* (Genesis 32:32) is reminiscent of the extraordinary fight between Jacob and the angel and points to the same association of thought. The forbidden piece of the animal

is derived from the part of its body that provides its sexual vitality.

Undoubtedly, this ritual emphasis on the sacredness of life as one prepares to engage in eating meat, suggests the Biblical intention to discourage meat eating. Feelings of guilt and fear are supposed to be present as a prelude to the carnal meal. The Jewish laws of *kashrut* further discourage the eating of meat by surrounding this act with all sorts of rules (i.e. *shehita*, salting). In fact, the Bible reports several occasions when God tried to put the Israelites back on an exclusive vegetarian diet discouraging them from eating meat. When Israel had just been redeemed from Egyptian bondage, it seemed to be the ideal moment to start afresh. God sent the *manna*, some kind of vegetable bread (Exodus 16:4). “*It tasted like something made with olive oil*” (Numbers 11:8). But the Israelites complained and asked for meat. God reluctantly gave up. The Biblical text speaks about God’s anger (Numbers 11:1) and clearly suggests that He did not approve of their request for meat (Numbers 11:4; Deuteronomy 12:20; cf. Psalm 106:14). The Hebrew verb *taawah*, which describes their intense longing to eat meat is usually associated with evil (Proverbs 21:26) or reprehensible lust. And when God failed to convince the Israelites to follow His vegetarian regime, He then did everything to disgust them with meat: “*Now the Lord will give you meat...You will eat it until it comes out of your nose. You will eat it until you hate it*” (Numbers 11:18-20; cf. Numbers 11:32-34).

Clean and Unclean Meat

The Mosaic laws of clean and unclean meat are another testimony of God's attempt to discourage the consumption of flesh. To the restriction regarding blood, God added a long series of prohibitions; not just any animal was permissible to be eaten. The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "*You can eat any animal that has hoofs that are separated completely in two. But it must also chew the cud*" (Leviticus 11:3). Animals that do not fill these requirements such as the pig (Leviticus 11:7) and the rabbit (Leviticus 11:6) are prohibited. As for the animals in the air, the Biblical text gives a long list of forbidden birds, mostly birds of prey (Leviticus 11: 13-19; Deuteronomy 14:12-18). On the basis of these lists, the Talmud gives the names of 24 forbidden birds (*Hullin* 63b). Several reasons have been suggested by the rabbis and Biblical scholars to explain the laws of "clean and unclean" meats: Spiritual reasons suggest, because unclean meat will obstruct human intelligence and spirituality (the Talmud); ethical reasons indicate such a discipline will help refine moral conduct such as obedience and self control (Midrash), or even compassion (Rabbi Kook) in addition to health and hygienic reasons (Maimonides). *None of these reasons is given by the Bible!* One reason is given implicitly through the numerous echoes and literary parallels between Leviticus 11 and the Creation story in Genesis 1. The same technical words and stylistic expressions are used ("beasts of the earth," "creeping animals," "after its kind," etc.). Furthermore, the listing of animals in Leviticus 11 follows the same sequence in

the passage of the Creation story covering the sixth day (Genesis 1:24-26). After the creation of the animals of the earth (Leviticus 11:2-8; cf. Genesis 1:24-25), the creation of man is related successively to that of the animals of water (Leviticus 11:9-12; cf. Genesis 1:26a), that of the animals of the air (Leviticus 11:13-23; cf. Genesis 1:26b), and that of the animals of the earth and of the reptiles (Leviticus 11:24-43; cf. Genesis 1:26c). Lastly, in Leviticus 11 as in Genesis 1:24-26, the relation between humans and animals has its counterpart in the relation between humans and God. In Genesis 1:20, the duty of domination over the animals is associated with the fact that humans are created in the image of God. Likewise in Leviticus 11, the duty to distinguish between clean and unclean meats is associated with the fact that human holiness reflects divine holiness: “*So be holy, because I am holy*” (Leviticus 11:44, 45).

The connection between the two texts suggests that behind the laws of clean and unclean animals lies a strong reference to the Creation story of Genesis 1, a context where life is celebrated—life without death. Why should we respect the laws of clean and unclean meats? For the same reason that we refrain from blood—because of the sacredness of life. It is, indeed, significant that the carnivorous animals are prohibited and generally the animals that are permitted to be eaten do not feed themselves on meat. The principle behind the *kosher* laws is simple: life is sacred. This is why the ideal Biblical diet can only be the vegetarian one. This is the one that was given at Creation

in the Garden of Eden; “The first man was not allowed to eat meat,” says the Talmud (*b. Sanhedrin* 59b). This will also be the regime of the “world to come” (Isaiah 11: 7; cf. Isaiah 65:25; Hosea 2:18). This is why the Biblical reason behind the dietary laws is not just ethical, hygienic, or religious. This is, in fact, the only explicit reason given by the Bible: *“I am the Lord your God. Set yourselves apart. Be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves “unclean” by eating any creatures that move around on the ground. I am the Lord. I brought you up out of Egypt to be your God. So be holy, because I am holy* (Leviticus 11:44-45).

Wine and Tobacco

It is interesting to note that the same religious reason is given by the Bible to justify the prohibition of alcohol.

The priests are enjoined to abstain from alcoholic beverages precisely because of the principle of holiness: *Then the Lord spoke to Aaron. He said, “You and your sons must not drink any kind of wine when you go into the Tent of Meeting. If you do, you will die. That is a law that will last for all time to come. You must be able to tell the difference between what is holy and what is not. You must be able to tell the difference between what is ‘clean’ and what is not”* (Leviticus 10:8-10). From this verse, the rabbis of the Talmud concluded that the priests had to be totally and always abstinent from any alcohol: “May not one be permitted to draw the deduction that it is forbidden to drink wine and strong drink only when in the act of entering the tabernacle of the congregation, but it is permissible to drink before entering the tabernacle. The

following verse, ‘that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean’ (Leviticus 10:10), does not allow such a deduction” (*Bava Metzia* 90b). To be sure, the Bible does not categorically forbid the drinking of wine but the warning against wine is repeated over and over again in the Scriptures: “Don’t look at wine when it is red. Don’t look at it when it bubbles in the cup. And don’t look at it when it goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a snake. It bites like a poisonous serpent”(Proverbs 23: 31-32; cf. Proverbs 20:1). And the fact that one of the first instances of consumption of an alcoholic drink was associated with great immorality (Genesis 19:31) suggests from the start the Biblical ideal of abstinence.

The Biblical principle of the value of life goes beyond the eating of meat and the drinking of alcohol; it also applies to other lifestyle choices which may affect our health and ultimately destroy our life. On the basis of the *halacha* (traditional law), “you should preserve your life” (*ushemartem et nafshotechem*); Rav Ovadia Yosef, chief rabbi of Israel, wished that the use of tobacco should be forbidden for a Jew.⁵ On the same matter, Rabbi Zalman Schachter thinks that it is inconsistent to keep *kosher* and indulge oneself in habits that are dangerous to our health: “There is a painful incongruity in the idea of a *halakhic* authority inhaling deeply on a cigarette as he ponders a question of *kashrut*. Can a substance at the same time be *kosher* and dangerous to health?”⁶

Life is sacred because God is life; life is holy because God is holy. The message of

the sacredness of life and the obligation to make life holy shouts aloud throughout the pages of the Scriptures. It is a call to the Jews, as well as, all human beings, not just in the abstract but in the concrete of our daily lives; because the God of Israel is the God of Creation, who gave us life.

⁵ Hervé Aaron Mimoun, *Notions de Santé et de prévention dans la Tradition Hébraïque* (Sarcellas, France: Otsar, 1985), 87.

⁶ Quoted by Louis A. Berman, XVI

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ב
רוך ארצה יהוה.
אלהינו מלך העולם
המוציא לנו מן
הארץ

א

Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God,
King of the Universe
Who causes the earth to yield food for all.