

**MEDICINE FOR THE BODY  
OR  
SALVE FOR THE SOUL?**

Source Materials  
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# ① RAMBAM - MOREH NEVUCHIM III:48

I say, then, that to eat any of the various kinds of food that the Law has forbidden us is blameworthy. Among all those forbidden to us, only pork and fat may be imagined not to be harmful. But this is not so, for pork is more humid than is proper and contains much superfluous matter. The major reason why the Law abhors it is its being very dirty and feeding on dirty things. You know to what extent the Law insists upon the need to remove filth out of sight, even in the field and in a military camp,<sup>5</sup> and all the more within cities. Now if swine were used for food, market places and even houses would have been dirtier than *latrines*, as may be seen at present in the country of the Franks.<sup>4</sup> You know the dictum of [the Sages], *may their memory be blessed: The mouth of a swine is like walking excrement.*<sup>5</sup>

# ② RASHBAM

According to the sense of Scriptures and in answer to the heretics all the flesh, fish, fowl or vermin forbidden us are unwholesome and harmful to the body: on this account they are termed "unclean".

# ③ ABRABANEL

השורץ ולא תטמאו בהם כי בזה היה ענין האטימות והטומאה ולא קראם הכתוב מזיקים ולא מחליאים כי אם טמאים ותועבה להורות שהיה טעם איסורם מפאת הנפש ולא מפאת הגוף ובריאותו כי היה צריך לשלמות הנפש ובהירותה וזכותה שיתישר מזג הגוף ויהיו מזונותיו מולידים דם זך ומזוקק לא גס ועבה ובלתי מיושר כמו שיתילד מן המאכלים האסורים. גם כי היו או המאכלים האסורים הם מתיחסים לעובדי ע"א וגם היום בארץ הודו אסור לאכול מן הבקר ומן הצאן כמו שזכר הרב המורה ובארצות אחרות אוכלות מאכלות אסורות מפני עבודת אלהיהם ולכך נקראו המאכלים האלה תועבה כמו שנקראת הע"א תועבה. הנה התבאר שהיה איסור המאכלות האלה מפני שלמות הנפש ובריאותה ולא מפאת הגוף והותרה בזה השאלה החי. ואמנם למה אסר השם אכילת הבשר לגמרי לאדם הראשון והתירה כלה לנח ולבניו לגמרי יעתה לישראל התיר קצתה ואסר קצתה. הנה יתבאר סבתו בסדר ראה אנכי:

איסור המאכלים שאסרה התורה כבר חשבו רבים מהמפרשים שהוא מפני בריאות הגוף ורפואתו להיות המאכלים הרעים ההם מולידים ליחות רעות זהו דעת הרמב"ן בפסוק ואלה תשקצו מן העוף וחלילה לי מלהאמין כן לפי שאם כן היה ספר תורת האלהים במדרגת ספר קטן מספרי הרפואה הקצרים בדבריהם וטעמיהם ואין זה דרך תורת האלהים ועומק כונותיה. וגם שענינו הראות האומות האוכלים בשר החזיר השקץ והעכבר ושאר העופות והבהמות והדגים הטמאים חיים כלם היום חזקים כראי מוצק ואין עיף ואין כושל בהם. גם כי יש בריאות אחרות שהיוקם מפירסם כאפעה נחש שרף ועקרב ולא נזכרו כאן בכלל האסורות וגם יש מהעשבים והצמחים המזיקים מאד וממיתים בארסיותם כמו אליסור וזולתם ממה שזכרו חכמי הרפואה ולא אסרה התורה אכילתם וכל זה ממה שיורה שלא באה התורה האלהית לרפאות את הגופות ולבקש בריאותם אלא לבקש בריאות הנפש ולרפאות תחלואיה ולכן אסרה המאכלים לפי שהיו מתעבים ומשקצים את הנפש הטהורה המשכלת ומולידות במזג האנושי אטימות וקלקול התאוות בעשותם באדם רוע מזג אשר ממנו תתהוה רוח הטומאה המטמאה הדעות המעשים ומגרש רוח הטהרה והקדושה שעליה בקש דוד (תהלים נ"א) ורוח קדשן אל תקח ממני. ואמר לב טהור ברא לי אלהים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי ומפני זה אמר יתברך אל תשקצו את נפשותיכם בכל השרץ

④ SEFER HA' CHINUCH

At the root of this precept lies the reason that the body is an instrument of the spirit: with it, it carries out its activity; without it, it can never complete its work. Therefore did it [the spirit] come into its shadow [for the spirit's benefit]<sup>6</sup> and not for its harm; for God never does harm, but only does good to benefit all. Thus we find that the body at its command<sup>7</sup> is like a pair of tongs in the hand of a blacksmith [i.e. any toolmaker]: With it he can produce a tool fit for its purpose.

Now in truth, if the tongs are strong and properly shaped to grasp tools in them, the craftsman can make them well. If the tongs are not good, the tools will never come out properly shaped and fit. In the same way, if there is any loss or damage in the body, of any kind, some function of the intelligence will be nullified, corresponding to that defect. For this reason our whole and perfect Torah removed us far from anything that causes such defect.

In this vein, according to the plain meaning we would say we were given a ban by the Torah against all forbidden foods. And if there are some among them whose harm is known [understood] neither by us nor by the wise men of medicine, do not wonder about them: The faithful, trustworthy Physician<sup>8</sup> who adjured us about them is wiser than both you and them. How foolish and hasty would anyone be who thought that nothing is harmful or useful except as he understands it.

For you should know that for our own good their reason and their harm [i.e. of the forbidden foods] were not revealed—for fear that people would rise up who considered themselves very wise, and becoming overwise they would say, "This harm which the Torah said exists in that thing is so only in that place, since such is its nature; or only for a man whose nature is thus-and-so." Then some fool may be foolishly persuaded by their words. Because of this their reason was not revealed, to help us avoid this stumbling-block.

5  
MIDRASH  
TANCHUMA

(ד) וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶהֱרֹן לֵאמֹר, זֹאת הַחֲזִיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ. לְמַדְנֵנוּ רַבְּנֵנוּ, כִּמְהָ בְּהֵמוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת יֵשׁ בְּעוֹלָם. כִּף שָׁנוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, עֶשֶׂר בְּהֵמוֹת הֵן, אֵיל וְצִבִי וְיַחְמוֹר וְאֶקוּ וְדִישָׁן וְתֹאוּ וְזָמֵר (דְּבָרִים י"ד), שׁוֹר שֶׁהָ כְּשָׂבִים וְשֶׁהָ עֵזִים (שֵׁם). יוֹתֵר מֵאֵלֶּה אֵין בְּעוֹלָם. אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, הִזְהָרוּ עֲצֻמְכֶם שְׂלֵא לְשַׁקֵּץ אֶת עֲצֻמְכֶם בְּבִהְמָה טְמֵאָה וּבְשֶׁרֶץ טְמֵאָה. כִּף אָמַר דָּוִד, הָאֵל תָּמִים דָּרְכוּ אֲמֵרַת ה' צְרוּפָה (תְּהִלִּים י"ח), בְּשָׁבִיל לְצַרְף בְּרִיּוֹתָיו. (אָמַר לוֹ, רַבִּי), מָה אֲכַפֵּת לוֹ לְהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂיֵאכְלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלֵא שְׁחִיטָה, שְׂיֵהֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹחַר וְאוֹכֵל וְשׁוֹחֵט מִן הַצִּנְאָר וּמִן הַיֶּרֶף. תִּדְעַ, שְׂלֵא נֶצְטוּוּ הַשְּׁחִיטָה הַזֶּה אֵלֵא כְּדֵי לְצַרְף אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי לְעֵתִיד לְבֹא עוֹשֶׂה סְעוּדָה לְצַדִּיקִים מִן הַבְּהֵמוֹת וְלוֹיָתָן וְאֵין שֵׁם שְׁחִיטָה.

"What does it matter to G-d whether the animal is slaughtered at the windpipe or at the nape of the neck?... or why is He concerned whether they eat kosher or non-kosher food? Rather, it is to purify and refine his creatures [man]"

6  
RAMBAN

וענין הדריסה הוא הצד ציד שירדוף<sup>60</sup> העופות ויתפשם חיים וידרסם בידיו<sup>61</sup>, ויאכל אותם כאשר יעשה הנץ הגס הנקרא אסטור, הנץ הדק הנקרא אשפרויר בלעז, ובערבי בוך, וזה משפט העופות באסורם והתירם על הדרך הנכון, והמתחורר בגמרא, ואשר הקרנוהו<sup>62</sup> ומצאנוהו כן בבדיקת העופות, והנה טעם האיסור בעופות<sup>63</sup> מפני אכזריות תולדותם, והבהמות<sup>64</sup> יתכן שיהיו כן מפני שאין בבעלי הגרה והפרסה השסועה דורס והשאר כלם יטרפו, והנה נמצא בתולדתם שנוי מה שהזכירו חכמים<sup>65</sup>, שכל חלב הטהורים עומד וחלב הטמאים כלם איננו נקפא ולא יתגבן לעולם, והנה הם משונים, ויתכן מזה שזויקו<sup>66</sup> באיברי הזרע ויהיה הזרע<sup>67</sup> המתאסף מן הלהת שבהם קרה ולחה ולא תוליד כלל, או לא תוליד בטוב ונכון, מלבד שיש במותרים<sup>68</sup> טובה ידועה<sup>69</sup> בדרך הרפואות, וראיתי בקצת ספרי הנסיונות<sup>70</sup> שחלב החזיר אם ינק היונק ממנו יהיה אותו הנער<sup>71</sup> מצורע, וזה לאות שיש בכלם סגולות רעות מאד:

Now the most important sign [of unfitness as food] in fowls is preying, for every bird of prey<sup>211</sup> is invariably unfit [as food]. The Torah removed it [from us] as food, because its blood becomes heated up due to its cruelty, and is dark and thick, which gives rise to that bitter [fluid in the body] which is mostly black<sup>212</sup> and tends to make the heart cruel. There is not another fowl in the whole world that is a bird of prey apart from those mentioned in this section,<sup>213</sup> and therefore one may know that any fowl which is a bird of prey, is one of those mentioned here. Thus if it is known for sure that it does not prey, it may definitely be eaten...

Thus the reason for certain birds being forbidden as food is on account of their cruel nature. It is also possible that the reason for certain animals [being forbidden] is similar, since no animal that chews the cud and has a parted hoof is a beast of prey, while the rest all devour others.

⑦ R. S. R. HIRSCH

God did not regulate your eating by these laws in order that you do not sicken physically: His word itself explains their meaning to you:

Just as the external temple, which represents your holy mission and to which you should sanctify yourself, becomes desecrated by טומאה (impurity), by everything which has sunken outside and beneath the human sphere (chap. 118), so are these foods טמא (impure) and unfit for the temple which you yourself are, i.e., for your body, your heart, your spirit, as far as they are all of them the living place of activity for your own being which is summoned unto holiness. If you have eaten them, not only touched them but absorbed them into your system—you may be more nourished and better fed: but the animal instinct will be aroused more strongly within you, and your body becomes more blunted as an instrument of the spirit. Your heart, instead of being holy, instead of striving only for your holiness—namely, your sublimity above everything animal-like, is drawn down to the animal—or becomes the more apathetic and dulled. Your spirit is now faced with a fiercer battle, and is less equipped for the fight. “These foods are טמא unto you.” “Do not make yourselves טמא with them.” “For you will yourselves become טמא through them.” Thus does the Torah repeatedly warn you. You become טמא, impure, less capable of your holy mission; and you should really be “anshei kodesh,” “men of sanctity,” members of a great, holy institution; this is the whole purpose of your election, to strive after Me to be holy, for I, Who should alone be your God, Whom alone you should freely allow to govern every manifestation of your life—I am holy! Thus you should preserve your body so that it be a pure temple of your Divine self. You should not add to it powers which will give the animal part therein a preponderance and pull down spirit and heart with it; for your body also is Mine, God's. And that which is usually expressed by טומאה, impurity, is also termed שקץ (shketz), a detestable thing.



## The Forbidden Oreo

As the outlaw cookie goes kosher and kosher goes mainstream,  
a rabbi wonders if Jews are becoming too assimilated.

**T**he news came racing across the Internet with apocalyptic urgency. My rabbinical chat group was abuzz. Could it finally be true? No, we don't have a Jewish President yet, but something almost equally astounding has transpired, a sign that Jews have finally made it. After 85 years in the gentile larder, Oreos are going kosher.

With the possible exception of Santa Claus and the Big Mac, the Oreo has long been the most infamous prohibition for observant Jewish children. We longed to taste this delicacy, whose ingredients included forbidden lard, but had to make do with inferior sawdust-textured substitutes. Some kids dreamed of catching a Mickey Mantle foul pop; I fantasized about unscrewing an Oreo and licking the middle.

In truth, Oreos could have passed muster seven years ago when Nabisco replaced lard with vegetable shortening. But only recently has it received official certification from the Orthodox Union, and over the next six months or so, packages sporting the Orthodox Union symbol will hit store shelves.

Oreos aren't the only prohibited food to become kosher. Chips Ahoy!, Honey Maid Grahams and many other products have also gone kosher. In fact, domestic sales of kosher products exceed \$3 billion annually, having achieved double-digit increases for each of the past five years. Because food companies produce mock sausage links and veggie burgers (these certified-kosher nonmeats can be consumed with dairy products), increasing numbers of nonobservant Jews and gentiles who happen to be vegetarians, or just health-conscious, buy kosher, as do Muslims, whose dietary taboo against pork is similar to that of Jews.

Many people naively assume when they see a kosher symbol that a pious old religious guy, somebody's grandpa, personally inspects and gives God's blessing to each item. While this is an exaggeration, the kosher symbol is perceived by an increasing number of people as a kind of Good Housekeeping Seal.

But now that kosher is in and Oreos will be O.K., I'm not sure I want them to be. I know that in some perverse manner my Oreo envy kept me safely at the outer edges of middle America, shielding me from total absorption into the vanilla masses. Oreos were the equivalent of white bread. More than anything else, the Jewish contribution to American culture has been the communication of the experience of marginality, of having survived Otherness. Oreo denial

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was, for me, a direct extension of Egyptian slavery — it made me uncomfortable enough to feel different and different enough to feel proud.

Now with Oreos becoming acceptable, I can still rely on that other forbidden food, the Hostess Twinkie. I can recall my first Twinkie: I was around 8; it was blond, soft and spongy, sweet and sensational. Mamie, my matronly Irish baby sitter, knew little of the tribal taboos in our household. Sure, she kept her ham sandwiches to herself and never fed me milk with meat. But how was she to know that this innocent, though unkosher, snack was as forbidden as a slab of bacon? It was just a Twinkie, and Mamie offered it to me. I was vulnerable. I was hungry. I was hooked. For weeks on end Mamie supplied me with Twinkies. Eventually, both Mamie and the Twinkies disappeared. She never had the chance to get me on to Oreos.

IT IS ALMOST MIDNIGHT. I'M SITTING IN MY KITCHEN, SAMPLING a batch of Oreos I requested from Nabisco. Holding one up to the light, I scrutinize the marvelous black medallion with the embossed OREO surrounded by a wreath of posies. I feel so normal. So American. I shudder. Has the Jewish condition ever been compatible with normalcy? Can we survive this?

A more formidable problem now lies before me: to dunk, bite or unscrew? As I hum, "A kid'll eat the middle of an Oreo first, ..." I begin to twist the top carefully with my left hand, holding the bottom cookie steady with my right.

The top breaks in half. I eat the broken cookie. It's good, but I crave a Twinkie. The thrill of the cookie is gone. The Oreo, a symbol of hollowness for African-Americans, reveals the masks Jews wear as well. As noble distinctions continue to crumble and cherished customs gain universal appeal, I am beginning to understand that a faith community cannot live by food taboos alone. True, we are what we eat, but we must be more. ■