

Dvar Torah for Elul

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Melichah 1*

Vegetarians and vegans, please forgive me. Even though the process of koshering meat was quite common in the days of Reb Noson, nowadays it is a long lost art, practiced only in kosher slaughterhouses, butcher shops and by a few extremely pious housewives, like my downstairs neighbor.

Koshering meat takes a number of steps. First, one has to have a kosher animal (or bird). The animal has to be properly kosher-slaughtered which requires a person who knows how to do it and can actually do it. The next step—removing from the animal various sinews and fats that are readily distinguishable—is messy, but less complicated. Then we can start the salting process (Hebrew: *melichah*). Meat must be salted since we are not permitted to consume blood. *Melichah* consists of three steps.

First the meat is washed and soaked in water to remove any blood adhering to the surface. If we were to salt the meat without washing it, the blood inside would become permanently absorbed. Next, the piece of meat is well-salted, on all sides. It is salted in a bowl that has holes in it, allowing the purged blood to drain. For all the blood to be purged, the meat has to remain salted for at least 18 minutes.

Finally, the meat is again washed to remove all the purged blood and bloody salt.

Melichah, says Reb Noson, parallels the *teshuvah* (return) process. Similarity number one, says Reb Noson, is that *teshuvah* is a process—it takes time. One cannot expect to become a near-perfect Jew overnight. One cannot even expect that the changes of *teshuvah* will be immediate and everlasting. *Teshuvah* can take a long, long time and requires great patience. One has to undergo a purging of “bad blood,” habits and attitudes, that have been absorbed into his identity and body memory.

The first step of *teshuvah* is “being slaughtered.” This means turning our backs on any and all sort of wrong doing in which we are involved. Tearing ourselves away from the familiar is gut-wrenching. Many times we feel that “it will kill me” to make necessary changes. However, once we have removed ourselves from primary sources of spiritual distraction, ridding ourselves of other temptations is easier and simpler. We wash ourselves off by discontinuing the obviously inappropriate.

In a certain way, however, the initial changes are quasi-cosmetic. We look like a clean piece of meat, but inside there’s plenty wrong. To Reb Noson, this is reminiscent of the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching, that at our initial stages of returning, God lifts us to a level far beyond what we deserve or are capable of. Then the meat is salted—we get tested by being made to wait.

Salting purges us of the “bad blood,” the near constant whining of our blood for stuff and activity which serve no good purpose. It is crucial to remember that the waiting, “the 18 minutes,” is to our benefit. *Teshuvah* is only real and effective when our desire for return stays strong even under duress. Getting rid of “bad blood” has to take time because we’ve spent years getting fired up for all sorts of body- and ego-indulgence. And the “bad blood” has to drain so that we don’t wallow in it, falling back to bad habits.

The second “washing” we do at that point is the genuine *tikkun*, remedy, for what we needed to fix—until we do *teshuvah* again.