



# Kashrut Principles as Taught by Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l

This week, on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, *Am Yisrael* commemorated the fifth *Yahrzeit* of a Torah giant—my Rebbe and teacher, Hagaon Harav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l.

During his lifetime, the Rav delivered thousands of in-depth shiurim across the spectrum of the religious world. He was blessed with an extraordinary intellect and a profound capacity for Torah knowledge. He taught in dozens of *yeshivot* and *kollelim*, regardless of political affiliation, number of participants, or scholastic level. All of this stemmed from the Rav's remarkable piety. His humility was unparalleled—he consistently distanced himself from any form of honor or recognition. He treated

everyone around him as an equal and cherished every insight in Torah, no matter who it came from. In his memory, this article will explore one aspect of Rav Zalman Nechemia's teachings, specifically related to kashrut.

## RABBINIC DECREES RELATED

### TO SAKANA (DANGER)

Our Sages instituted numerous laws regarding food and drink based on the concept of *sakanah*—potential danger. These dangers typically relate to health risks that could arise from not adhering to certain practices.

One well-known example is the halacha prohibiting the consumption of meat and fish together. Although there is no explicit biblical source for this prohibition, our Sages had a tradition to avoid mixing or consuming them together. Even today, when no clear health risk is evident, we continue to refrain based on the halachic principle that once a decree is made, it remains in force unless formally annulled by a *Sanhedrin*.

A similar halacha tied to *sakanah* involves the laws of *giluy* (uncovered beverages). The *Gemara* (Avodah Zarah 30a) discusses the prohibition against drinking beverages left uncovered and unattended, due to concerns that venomous creatures—such as snakes or scorpions—might drink from them and leave



The author in his yeshiva days with Hagaon Harav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l



behind poison. *Tosafot* (Avodah Zarah 35a) writes that in the countries where they lived, this concern did not apply, and therefore, such beverages were permitted. The *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 116:1) rules accordingly: one may drink a beverage that was left uncovered if the local context poses no danger.

This raises a critical question:

Why do the laws of *giluy* change based on time and place, while the prohibition of mixing meat and fish does not? Generally, rabbinic decrees and any Torah law remains fixed and unchangeable, even if their original reasoning no longer applies—unless changed by a *Sanhedrin*.

#### RAV ZALMAN NECHEMIA'S INSIGHT

Rav Zalman Nechemia provided a brilliant explanation of this apparent inconsistency. While it is true, as seen in the *Gemara* (*Beitzah* 5:a), that rabbinic decrees cannot be nullified even if their original reasoning no longer applies, our Sages themselves created categories within rabbinic legislation. In the case of *giluy*, the prohibition was conditional from the outset—its applicability was explicitly tied to the presence of venomous creatures like snakes. The halacha was never intended to be universally binding in all times and places. It was a decree based on existing danger, not an abstract principle. Rav Zalman Nechemia explained that in many cases, the reason behind a decree supports it, but is not its essence. Therefore, even when the logic no longer applies, the decree stands. However, in cases where the reason is the foundation of the law itself, the halacha can change with changing circumstances.

Thus, the prohibition of mixing meat and fish

remains in effect regardless of current health concerns, because the decree was made as a binding rule independent of ongoing medical reality. In contrast, the laws of *giluy* were inherently conditional and subject to change.

#### A BROADER HALACHIC FRAMEWORK

Rav Zalman Nechemia expanded this idea across various areas of halacha, showing that not all decrees and rulings are equal in nature or flexibility. A striking example involves the laws of *terefot* (non-kosher due to fatal defects).

According to tradition, any kosher animal that has a physical defect causing it to die within 12 months is not kosher. These defects are listed in the *Gemara* and are considered laws handed down from *Moshe Rabbeinu* at *Har Sinai*. The *Rambam* rules that even if a doctor is certain the animal will live, the halacha remains fixed—we rely on the tradition.

However, when it comes to human *terefot* (e.g., whether someone who kills a gravely ill person is fully liable for murder), the *Rambam* rules that the determination depends on medical professionals of the time. This seems contradictory—why trust modern medicine in one case but not the other? Rav Zalman Nechemia



quotes Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski in Responsa *Achiezer*, who explains the distinction: The laws of animal *terefot* are based on tradition, while the laws of human *terefot* were not specified in the Torah and were always intended to follow contemporary medical knowledge. Once again, we see a critical theme in Rav Zalman Nechemia's teachings:

When halachic rulings are founded on specific reasoning, and that reasoning is made part of the decree, the halacha may evolve with time and circumstance. But when the law is rooted in tradition, even if it includes logical explanations, it remains fixed.

#### A PERSONAL NOTE

While I was a talmid in Yeshivat Ohr Etzion, I had the immense honor and privilege of driving Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg to his weekly shiurim. His vast Torah knowledge left a deep and lasting impression on me and on all who merited to learn from him. The Rav was a beacon of inspiration, teaching Torah to anyone who wished to listen. His dedication and love for Torah impacted the lives of thousands of *talmidim*. From this Torah giant, we learn that Torah study is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a way of life—a part of the Jewish soul.

May his legacy of Torah learning continue to inspire *Am Yisrael* for generations to come. ■

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