



Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l on Gelatin

This week, we celebrate Rosh Chodesh Elul, which is also the *yahrzeit* of my Rebbe and mentor, Hagaon Harav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l.

Not a day goes by without Am Yisrael feeling the absence of Rav Zalman Nechemia's presence. Beyond the thousands of in-depth shiurim he delivered, his extraordinary intellect and profound knowledge of Torah made him one of the greatest Torah scholars and halachic authorities of his generation.

Rav Zalman Nechemia was the epitome of a righteous Rav and leader. His incredible depth in Torah enabled him to become one of the most sought-after *dayanim* of his time and to serve as a halachic authority on some of the most difficult and complex questions of the last several generations.

Yet, despite having every reason to take pride in his accomplishments, Rav Zalman Nechemia was among the humblest of people. He never dismissed anyone. He would answer questions from anyone who approached him

and taught in dozens of *yeshivot* and *kollelim*, regardless of political affiliation, the number of participants, or their level of scholarship.

All of this stemmed from the Rav's remarkable *Yirat Shamayim* and genuine devotion to Torah. Rav Zalman Nechemia never sought political influence, recognition, or rabbinic honor. His greatness came from a completely different place. He saw himself as someone whose responsibility was to pass the wisdom of Torah and the way of life of mitzvot on to the next generation.

The following discussion on the halachic status of gelatin is one of the many important teachings of Rav Zalman Nechemia in the field of Kashrut.

GELATIN IN FOODS

Although there is a constant shift in food production away from animal-based ingredients, certain animal-derived ingredients remain fundamental to modern food manufacturing. One of the most common exam-

ples is gelatin.

Gelatin is a clear, flavorless protein used primarily as a gelling, stabilizing, and thickening agent. It is found in a wide variety of foods, including marshmallows, gummy candies, ice cream, yogurt, desserts, and many other products.

Gelatin is produced from collagen. Although collagen can also be derived from certain plant or fish sources, the overwhelming majority of conventional gelatin has



Rabbi Zalman
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historically been produced from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of animals, particularly cattle and pigs.

From a Kashrut perspective, this creates an obvious concern. If gelatin is produced from non-kosher animals, or from animals that were not slaughtered according to halacha, the source material itself is not kosher.

Gelatin has been used in culinary and food production for well over 100 years, and throughout the generations, many of the greatest halachic authorities have addressed the question of its kosher status.

THE SOURCE OF THE DISPUTE

Early forms of gelatin were produced from animal bones left over after the processing of meat. The halachic discussion therefore focused on the status of bones from non-kosher animals or from animals that had not been properly slaughtered.

On the one hand, there is an explicit discussion in the *Gemara* (*Chullin* 77b) indicating that while the meat of a non-kosher or improperly slaughtered animal is prohibited, certain parts of the animal, including its skin and bones, may not have the same status as the meat itself.

On the other hand, another discussion in the *Gemara* (*Chullin* 117b) appears to indicate that there is at least a rabbinic prohibition concerning the consumption of bones from a non-kosher source.

This leads to an important question: What type of bones are we discussing? Is there a difference between hard bones and soft bones? What about bones that contain edible

marrow? And does the halachic status change depending on whether the bones themselves are normally considered edible?

The Two Opinions

Responsa *Achiezer* (3:33), however, brings proof that there is a distinction between hard and soft bones. Hard bones have no prohibition in themselves. One indication of this is the *Gemara's* discussion regarding the nullification of non-kosher meat that becomes mixed with kosher food. The volume of the bones can be included in calculating the volume of the mixture, indicating that hard bones do not have the same status as prohibited food.

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Soft bones, however, may be subject to a rabbinic prohibition.

This understanding resolves the apparent contradiction between the different sources in the Talmud. Based on this approach, the *Achiezer* and other authorities permitted gelatin produced from hard bones. See also *Chazon Yechezkel, Zevachim* 5.

The *Pri Megadim* (YD 87:22), however, and other authorities understood the matter differently. According to their approach, both hard and soft bones are prohibited.

They understand the *Rambam* as ruling that bones, although not normally considered edible, are still part of the prohibited animal and therefore retain the prohibited status of the animal. Since bones are not ordinarily considered food, however, the prohibition may be only rabbinic in nature.

RAV ZALMAN NECHEMIA'S INSIGHT

Although many later authorities discuss the distinction between hard and soft bones, the *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 99:1) rules that bones from a non-kosher animal, or from an animal that was not properly slaughtered, may be included in the calculation when determining whether a mixture has become nullified.

At first glance, this would seem to indicate that the *Shulchan Aruch* considers bones to have a prohibited status, regardless of their source.

Rav Ovadia Yosef, in *Responsa Yabia Omer* (8:11), cites this ruling as evidence that the *Shulchan Aruch* would nevertheless permit gelatin produced from non-kosher animal bones.

Rav Zalman Nechemia, however, pointed out an apparent contradiction within the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In *Yoreh Deah* 87:7, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that when bones from meat are cooked

together with milk, there is a rabbinic prohibition against consuming the mixture because the bones themselves have a prohibited status.

How, then, can the *Shulchan Aruch* allow bones to be included in the calculation of a mixture in one context while treating those same bones as prohibited in another?

Rav Zalman Nechemia offered a unique insight to resolve this apparent contradiction.

He explained this through the halachic concept of *Achshevei*. *Achshevei* refers to a situation in which something that is ordinarily considered inedible, insignificant, or unfit for consumption is nevertheless intentionally treated as food by a particular person. By doing so, that person gives the item halachic significance.

A classic example is chametz on Pesach. If a person were to consume chametz that had become completely rotten and would normally be considered inedible, but that individual nevertheless considered it edible and ate it, the concept of *Achshevei* can give the item significance for that person and result in a prohibition of consuming it.

Rav Zalman Nechemia used this concept to explain the seemingly contradictory rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

When discussing the inclusion of bones in the calculation of a mixture, the *Shulchan Aruch* is dealing with a situation in which the bones entered the mixture inadvertently. Since bones are not normally considered food, they can be included in the calculation and help determine whether the prohibited substance has been nullified.

In *Yoreh Deah* 87, however, the case is different. There, a person intentionally cooks the bones together with milk. Because the person specifically chooses to use the bones as part

of the food, the bones become *Achshevei*—they are being treated as food and therefore acquire halachic significance.

According to Rav Zalman Nechemia, this distinction creates a significant concern regarding gelatin.

Gelatin is not produced from animal bones accidentally or incidentally. The bones are specifically selected and processed for the purpose of producing an ingredient that will be used as food. The entire purpose of the manufacturing process is to extract the collagen and transform it into a usable food ingredient.

Therefore, the concept of *Achshevei* becomes highly relevant. Since the bones are intentionally being used to produce a food ingredient, they acquire the status of something significant and edible. According to this approach, gelatin produced from non-kosher bones would remain prohibited, even if the original bones themselves might otherwise have been considered inedible.

This provides an important insight into the halachic discussion surrounding gelatin and demonstrates how the practical realities of modern food production can affect the application of established halachic principles.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

I had the tremendous *zechut* to have a special relationship with Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. To me, he represented the ideal combination of a true Torah giant and a profoundly pious and humble individual.

His depth and genius in Torah were simply beyond comprehension. Yet, at the same time, his simplicity and genuine humility were apparent in his every action. Despite his extraordinary stature, he never made a person feel insignificant or unworthy of his time.

Rav Zalman Nechemia dedicated his life to

teaching authentic, in-depth Torah to anyone who wished to learn. His Torah was not merely about knowledge. He taught a way of thinking, a way of living, and a way of approaching the responsibility of a Torah Jew.

His teachings and his Torah perspective will continue to echo through generations. Although his physical presence is deeply missed by Am Yisrael, the Torah that he taught continues to live through his students and through everyone who was fortunate enough to learn from him.

May we be worthy of continuing his legacy for generations to come.

Zecher Tzaddik Livracha! ■

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