

# Ariel Sharon and the Chicken Crisis

Category: Shmini, Vayikra

*When Arik Sharon and Rabbi Grossman joined forces for kosher food.*

## The Chicken Problem

Several weeks ago, a book was released about Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, called *Living Legend*. It's a biography about his life, and especially about his activities in Migdal Ha'emek, a formerly poor and crime-ridden Israeli town, where he established a web of institutions to help underprivileged children.

One of the stories he tells is regarding his position as Rabbi of the city. One of his tasks was to provide the kosher supervision for the local food establishments. One such establishment was the local slaughterhouse. A mashgiach appointed by Rabbi Grossman was responsible to ensure that all the chickens were properly slaughtered and inspected, and that the non-kosher chickens were carefully set aside in a different storage house, to ensure that they didn't mix with the kosher ones.

One day, the supervisor reported disturbing news. A number of boxes of non-kosher chickens — unable to be sold — had disappeared. They had been set aside the night before, but by the morning, they were gone. An investigation revealed that the owner of the slaughterhouse had visited the location the night before, and, seeing so many chickens going to waste, had ordered the custodian to move half the boxes into the kosher section.

Rabbi Grossman immediately telephoned Tenuva, the company that purchased the vast majority of the chickens processed in the plant, and informed them that the kashrut certification had been removed and that the chickens should not be purchased.

It didn't take long for the reaction to come. Tenuva was their main customer, which meant that the plant was in danger of closing its doors. The owner called the Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour, Ariel Sharon, and told him that

because of Rabbi Grossman, many families would lose their only source of livelihood.

Arik called up Rabbi Grossman and began the conversation like a veteran Torah scholar. “One man sins and you are angry at the entire community?” (Shelach 16:22) “Because the owner did something wrong, you are punishing all the workers?”

Rabbi Grossman responded that it was not a conversation suited for the telephone. He wanted a meeting.

Arik Sharon was a kibbutznik, with minimal knowledge of Jewish observance, but during their meeting, Rabbi Grossman gave him a crash course in the laws of Kashrus and explained the great responsibility that he carried as the rabbi tasked with ensuring the food’s kosher status.

“You were a celebrated general in the military,” he told Arik. “What would you do if you gave a specific set of orders to your subordinate, and he then proceeded to do the exact opposite, changing the face of the entire mission. Would you remain silent?”

Sharon listened quietly.

“I am an officer in the army, and people rely on me to ensure that their food is kosher. When I give a certification, they know they can trust me. Here you have an owner — who earns millions from processing thousands of birds — and instead of seeing the bigger picture, he mixes in a few boxes, which are really irrelevant in the broader scheme.

“If someone is willing to endanger his entire plant for a few boxes of chicken, his judgment is clearly skewed. He cannot be trusted to follow the instructions, and I therefore cannot certify the establishment so long as he is the owner.”

Sharon called the owner and told him that he would need to sell the plant. It took some time, but in the end, the plant was transferred to new owners and the rabbi returned his kosher certification. (Living Legend 304).

# Powerful Names

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the laws of kosher animals — which animals are kosher and which animals are not. What are the signs of a kosher animal? (question the crowd). Chewing cud and split hooves. What are the signs for a kosher fish? Fins and scales. What are the signs of a kosher bird? The answer is that Torah doesn't give signs. Instead, it gives a list of prohibited birds. In our day, we only eat birds which we know are kosher based on our tradition.

Now, our sages taught us in the Talmud that the names of the birds in Torah are not randomized terms. Rather, they teach us something about the birds' nature.

Here are three examples:

One bird is called the Racham (Magpie or Egyptian Vulture), which stems from the word "mercy." The Talmud says that it was called Racham because, "When the Racham comes to the world, mercy comes to the world." The Racham is a sign of mercy, because when the Racham bird arrives, it is right before fall, when G-d is about to grant the world a large measure of rainwater. Therefore, it is called Racham. (Chullin 63a).

Another example is the Chasidah (the Stork) which stems from the word "chesed, kindness." "Why is she called Chasidah?" asks the Talmud, "Because she shares her food with her fellow birds, which is not typical for animals." The question is posed in Chassidic teachings: If she is a kind bird, why was she deemed unkosher? The answer is that she does kindness with her own kind, but she is also a carnivore which consumes other species. True kindness is for the stranger as well.

A third example is the Shalach (cormorant). It is called Shalach because it draws out (*sholeh*) fish from the sea. It draws its sustenance by diving into the sea and catching fish. The Talmud relates that when Rabbi Yochanan would see a Shalach, he would cite the verse, "*Mishpatecha tehom rabba*, Your judgments reach into the depths," because the Shalach represents the presence of G-d even in the depths of the sea. His behavior demonstrates that G-d's providence even reaches the fish — G-d determines which fish will be picked up by the Shalach, and which will survive.

One of the foundations of Judaism in general, and Chasidism in particular, is the idea of Divine Providence. G-d watches over every person and is involved in everything that happens to him, but Chasidism adds that this same is true for animals and even fish — they too, experience Divine providence. Even vegetation and inanimate objects are subject to His attention.

The message is that the world is compared to a stormy sea. From an external point of view, it seems that the world follows a natural course of events. However, when we dive into the sea, meaning, when we contemplate everything that goes on “under the surface,” we see that it is all G-d’s hand. (Lekutei Sichos vol. 7 pg. 54)