

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [197]

### I Am a Jew and You Have Given me Swine's Meat?!

Insights into Numbers Rabbah 20:21



#### Background to Our Story

##### An oldie but a good one...

*A middle-aged woman has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she has a near death experience. During that experience she sees God and asks if this is it. God says no and explains that she has another 30 years to live.*

*Upon her recovery she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, etc. She even has someone come in and change her hair color. She figures since she's got another 30 years she might as well make the most of it.*

*She walks out of the hospital after the last operation and is killed by an ambulance speeding by. She arrives in front of God and complains, "I thought you said I had another 30 years."*

*God replies, I didn't recognize you."*

#### Kosher Animals



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosher\\_animals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosher_animals)

Kosher animals are those that comply with the regulations of Jewish dietary law and are considered fit to eat. These food regulations ultimately derive from various passages in the Torah with various modifications, additions and clarifications added to these rules by traditional Jewish law.

[Leviticus 11:3-8](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:4-8](#) both give the same general set of rules for identifying which land animals (Hebrew: בהמות *Behemoth*) are [ritually clean](#). According to

these, anything that "[chews the cud](#)" and has a [completely split hoof](#) is ritually clean, but those animals that only chew the cud or only have cloven hooves are unclean.

Both documents explicitly list four animals as being ritually impure:

- The [camel](#), for chewing the cud without its hooves being divided.
- The [hyrax](#), for chewing the cud without having cloven hooves. (The Hebrew term for this animal - [יָפֹשׁ shaphan](#) - has been translated by older English versions of the bible as [coney](#); the existence of the hyrax wasn't known to early English translators. The coney was an exclusively European animal, not present in [Canaan](#), while the *shaphan* was described by the [Book of Proverbs](#) as living on rocks like the hyrax, but unlike the coney.)
- The [hare](#), for chewing the cud without having cloven hooves.
- The [pig](#), for having cloven hooves without chewing the cud.

## Washing Hands



<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hand-washing/>

In Temple times there were elaborate rules in connection with ritual impurity. If a person had been rendered impure through having come into contact, say, with a dead rodent, he contaminated sacred food such as the tithe given to the priests, which must then not be eaten. The way in which contamination of this kind could be removed was through immersion in a ritual bath.

But the sages imposed in certain circumstances the minor form of contamination known as "hand contamination" in which only the hands, not the whole body, was contaminated and for this to be removed total immersion was not required, only the ritual washing of the hands. Since there was a good deal of priests' tithe in ancient Palestine which could easily come into contact with the hands, the sages eventually ordained that the hands of every Jew, not only the hands of a priest, must be washed ritually before meals.

### Not a Matter of Hygiene

It has to be appreciated that this ritual washing of the hands has nothing to do with physical cleanliness. On hygienic grounds, the hands are obviously to be clean of dirt before food is eaten. Even when the hands are physically clean they are still required to be ritually washed.

Although the original reason for washing the hands no longer applies, since there is no sacred food to be eaten, the ritual was continued on the grounds that the ideal of holiness demands a special, ritualistic washing of the hands. The act of washing the hands in this sense is seen as the introduction of the holiness ideal into the mundane life of the Jew. This ritual washing is only required before a meal at which bread is eaten.

### Procedure and Practice

The procedure is to pour water out from a cup or glass first twice over the right hand and then twice over the left hand—care being taken that the unwashed hands do not touch the water used for the washing. The hands are then dried with a towel before partaking of the meal. A benediction is recited over the washing of the hands: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Thy commandments and has commanded us concerning the washing of the hands."

Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs (1920-2006) was a Masorti rabbi, the first leader of Masorti Judaism (also known as Conservative Judaism) in the United Kingdom, and a leading writer and thinker on Judaism. Reprinted from [The Jewish Religion: A Companion](#), published by Oxford University Press.

## Blessings before Eating



[http://www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard\\_cdo/aid/113500/jewish/Blessings-before-Eating.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/howto/wizard_cdo/aid/113500/jewish/Blessings-before-Eating.htm)

In addition to the biblically mandated Grace After Meals, the Sages ordained that "one should not derive benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing." Making a blessing before eating is tantamount to "asking permission" from G-d, acknowledging that "the world, and everything in it, is G-d's" (Psalms 24:1) and G-d is the true source of all the gifts of life.

Different blessings are recited before eating different types of food. All begin with the words, "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the World...." We then continue:

For bread: "... who brings forth bread from the earth." (In addition, meals including bread are preceded with the ritual washing of the hands and the blessing "...who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us regarding the washing of the hands.")

For other foods made with grain: "....who creates types of food."

For wine: "....who creates the fruit of the vine."

For fruit: "....who creates the fruit of the tree."

For vegetables: "...who creates the fruit of the ground."

For everything else: "....by whose word everything came into being."

## Maneh (Jewish Coinage in the time of the Talmud)

[http://www.jewishmag.com/145mag/jewish\\_coins/jewish\\_coins.htm](http://www.jewishmag.com/145mag/jewish_coins/jewish_coins.htm)

Another monetary term written during the Tannaitic and the early Amoraic periods (1st to the 3rd centuries) was the 'maneh' a term, which meant 100 denarii. However, from the third century onwards, it use was referred to a single denarius. In Tanhuma Balak (Talmudic text dated about c. 303-304 AD) we read of a pound of kosher beef was priced at eight maneh. While the same amount of pork cost ten maneh according to Edict of Diocletian - one Italian pound of beef eight denarii and of pork twelve denarii. Hence maneh equal denarius.

## Bar Kokhba revolt and Hadrianic Pesecution



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar\\_Kokhba\\_revolt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kokhba_revolt)

The Bar Kokhba revolt (Hebrew: מרד בר כוכבא or *mered Bar Kokhba*), was a rebellion of the Jews of Judea Province, led by Simon bar Kokhba, against the Roman Empire. Fought circa 132–136 CE,<sup>[3]</sup> it was the last of three major Jewish–Roman wars, so it is also known as The Third Jewish–Roman War or The Third Jewish Revolt. Some historians also refer to it as the Second Revolt of Judea, not counting the Kitos War (115–117 CE), which had only marginally been fought in Judea.

The revolt erupted as a result of religious and political tensions in Judea province, bringing the conflict of the Romans and the Jews into its climax. Simon bar Kokhba, the commander of the revolt, was regarded by many Jews as the Messiah, who would restore their national independence.<sup>[4]</sup> Initial rebel victories over Romans established an independent state of Israel over parts of Judea for over two years, as Bar Kokhba took the title of Nasi ("prince"). This setback however caused Roman Emperor Hadrian to assemble a large scale Roman force from across the Empire, which invaded Judea in 134 under the command of Roman General Julius Severus. The Roman army was made of six full legions with auxiliaries and elements from up to six additional legions, which finally managed to crush the revolt.



In the years following the revolt, Hadrian discriminated against all Judeo-Christian sects, but the worst persecution was directed against religious Jews. He made anti-religious decrees forbidding Torah study, Sabbath observance, circumcision, Jewish courts, meeting in synagogues and other ritual practices. Many Jews assimilated and many sages and prominent men were martyred including Rabbi Akiva and the rest of the *Asara Harugei Malchut* (ten martyrs). This age of persecution lasted throughout the remainder of Hadrian's reign, until 138 C.E.

### Having a meal in Ancient times



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_Roman\\_cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Roman_cuisine)

Over the course of the Republican period, the *cena* developed into 2 courses: a main course and a dessert with fruit and seafood (e.g. molluscs, shrimp). By the end of the Republic, it was usual for the meal to be served in 3 parts: one course (*gustatio*), main course (*primae mensae*), and dessert (*secundae mensae*).

Originally flat, round loaves made of emmer (a cereal grain closely related to wheat) with a bit of salt were eaten; among the upper classes, eggs, cheese, and honey, along with milk and fruit were also consumed. In the Imperial period, around the beginning of the Christian era, bread made of wheat was introduced; with time, more and more wheaten foods began to replace emmer loaves.

The bread was sometimes dipped in wine and eaten with olives, cheese, and grapes. They also ate wild boar, beef, sausages, pork, lamb, duck, goose, chickens, small birds, fish, and shellfish.

## The Text: Numbers Rabbah 20:21

מעשה

בשעת הגזירה בתנוני אתר מישראל שהיה מבשל בשר מהור ובשר חזיר ומוכר (ע) שלא ירגשו בו שהוא יהודי וכן היה מנהגו כל מי שנכנס לחנות שלו ולא נמל ידיו יודע שהוא עובד כוכבים ונותן לפניו בשר חזיר וכל מי שנמל ידיו ומברך יודע שהוא ישראל ומאכילו בשר מהור פעם אחת נכנס יהודי לאכול שם ולא נמל ידיו והיה סבור שהוא עובד כוכבים נתן לפניו בשר חזיר אבל ולא בירך בא לעשות עמו חשבון על הפת ועל הבשר אמר לו יש לי עליך כך וכך מן הבשר שהאכלת שהתיכה עולה עשרה מנה אמר לו אתמול אכלתי אותה בח' והיום אתה רוצה ליטול ממני עשרה אמר לו זו שאכלת של חזיר היא כיון שאמר לו כך עמדו שערותיו נבהל ונחפז אמר לו בצנעה יהודי אני ונתת לי בשר חזיר אמר לו תיפת רוחך שכשראיתו שאכלת בלא נטילת ידים ובלא ברכה הייתי סבור שאתה עובד כוכבים

An incident is related that during the time of religious persecution, a certain Israelite shopkeeper used to cook ritually clean meat as well as the meat of swine and sell them so that it might not be suspected that he was a Jew.

His practice was that if anyone came into his shop (to eat) and did not wash his hands, he would know that he was an idol worshiper and would place before him the meat of swine, and whoever washed his hands and blessed, he would know that he was an Israelite and would give him ritually clean meat.

Once a Jew came in to eat and did not wash his hands, so he thought that he was an idol worshiper and placed swine's meat before him. The man ate and did not bless. When he came to settle the account for the bread and the meat, the shopkeeper said to him: "I have a claim on you for such-and-such a sum on account of the meat you have eaten, for each piece costs ten *manehs*." The other [the customer] said: "Yesterday I got it for eight and today you want to take ten from me, do you?" He [the shopkeeper] answered him: "The piece you have eaten is from the swine." When he told him this, his [the Israelite's] hair stood on end, and he fell into a great fright

and said to him [to the shopkeeper] quietly: "I am a Jew and you have given me swine's meat?!"

He [the shopkeeper] said to him: "A plague on you! When I saw that you ate without washing your hands and without a blessing, I thought you were an idol worshiper!"



### Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Why did the Israelite shopkeeper cook two types of meat (kosher and non-kosher) during the religious persecution?

**?** How did the Israelite shopkeeper identify among his clients who was a Jew and who wasn't? Why didn't he ask them?

**Bonus ?** Why was it important for the Israelite shopkeeper to identify among his clients who was a Jew and who wasn't?

**Bonus ?** Why did the Israelite shopkeeper chose the washing of the hands and blessings as a sign of Jewish identity?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why didn't the Israelite wash his hands and say a blessing before eating his food?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why do you think non-kosher meat was more expensive in the shopkeeper's store?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why is the Israelite shocked at the fact that he had eaten swine meat?

**Bonus ?** Why did the shopkeeper say to the Israelite “ a plague on you!”?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

**!** • If you don’t uphold your own standards, don’t expect others to uphold them for you!