

Shomer Mitzvot

A Short Drash on Acts Chapter 10

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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

The Roman Centurion Cornelius, a "God-fearer" (a technical term describing a Gentile that keeps most of the Torah, but stops short of ritual circumcision), is visited by an angel to inquire of Shim'on Kefa (Simon Peter) for instruction. Kefa is staying with a man also named Shim'on. One day Kefa also has a vision from HaShem (God) concerning a four cornered sheet containing all manner of animals on it. He is instructed three times to "Rise, kill, and eat". All three times he refuses, explaining that he will not eat something *treif* (literally torn, or not fit for consumption), for he has remained *kosher* (a Torah-based diet) all of his life. HaShem tells him not to call "common" what He has called "cleansed" (KJV). The vision fades.

Meanwhile, Cornelius has sent men to inquire of Kefa. They meet him and request that he accompany them back to their master, which he does, along with a few of his own acquaintances. They reach Cornelius a few days later and upon seeing Kefa, Cornelius prostrates himself before this Jewish fisherman. Of course Kefa, being just a man, does not accept this unworthy accolade, and asks Cornelius to stand and talk with him.

A small mix of Jew and non-Jew were gathered there that day, as Kefa explained that it was not "lawful" or taboo for Jews to *schmooze* (mingle) with non-Jews, but that HaShem had instructed him (Kefa) not to consider non-Jews as *treif*. Indeed, Kefa proclaims that he now understands, after hearing Cornelius' vision account, that HaShem is "no respecter of persons" (KJV). The good news, that Yeshua (Jesus) can and will save Jew as well as non-Jew, is made clear to everyone in the room. To be sure, as Kefa is speaking, suddenly the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) falls "on all them which hear[d] the word" (KJV). The *parashah* (chapter portion) ends with the men being immersed into the name of ADONAI.

I personally believe that Kefa's interpretation of his own vision is the best and most important interpretation offered. Namely this: what HaShem has designated as *kosher* (fit for consumption) and *treif* (not fit for consumption) in

the Torah of Moshe (Law of Moses), concerning food for Jews, still remains clean and unclean respectively. Although the sheet contained all manner of animals, I believe what HaShem is trying to get Kefa to understand is that the animals represent all manner of peoples, not the literal animals themselves. This interpretation is in accord with the unchangeable nature of HaShem. To be sure, is this not how Kefa interprets the vision himself in verses 28, 34 and 35?

As a side issue, it is helpful to know that it is not "unlawful" to *schmooze* with the non-Jews, as Kefa is asserting here. The Torah speaks nothing to the Jewish people of totally refraining from contact from the surrounding nations. On the contrary, it compels them be an example people, and to be ready to give the Good news of the One and True God to them... complete with the Torah (see [Deut. 4:1-10](#))! Rather, this type of Jewish paranoia developed from within the extra-biblical sayings know as "Oral Torah", later, codified and passed along to the Jews as a type of commentary on Torah, and today known as the Talmud. Although the bulk of Talmud is "harmlessly" given over to explaining various Torah passages and how to develop a proper *halachah* (walk according to Torah), a few passages do speak unfavorably of Gentile contact with Jews. The fact that Kefa makes this statement to Cornelius' household is proof that in Yeshua's day, a gross misinterpretation of the true nature of the Torah existed, and sadly, still does today among many Jews!

Yeshua came to bring his people back, from the perversion of Torah, to the true nature and interpretation of his father's Torah! I could go on and on about the relationship of the Torah to non-Jews (see chapter 15 of this same book), but that is an entirely different drash....