FISH and milk

19th of Cheshvan, 5771

The Torah explicitly prohibits the mixing and consumption of meat and milk. The Rabbis extended this prohibition to include not only red meat but white meat (fowl) as well.

Last week we also explained the prohibition of mixing meat with fish, which the Rabbis forbade for a completely different reason: health concerns (see HOTD Wednesday Cheshvan 12).

What about fish with milk?

The Talmud (Chulin) states explicitly that fish and milk is a permitted combination.

However, Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575), the famous author of the Shulchan Arukh, indicated in his book 'Bet Yosef' the custom to refrain from eating fish and milk.

There were two explanations given by later commentators as of why Rabbi Yosef Caro would prohibit milk and fish.

1. Health considerations, similar to meat and fish. Keep in mind that milk and fish are two common animal food allergens. (Newly discovered health considerations would, in principle, override an explicit ruling of the Talmud)

2. Most Ashkenazi Rabbis and some prominent Sephardic Rabbis, however, considered Rabbi Yosef Caro's statement as a 'misprint' on the text of the Bet Yosef, where a copyist confused between 'milk' and 'meat'.

As of today most observant Jews, including our own community members, would not refrain from mixing fish and dairy.

Some Sephardic Jews, mostly from Syrian communities, and some Chassidic Jews, would still avoid eating fish with milk.

However, even they would acknowledge that the problem only exists in mixing fish with ‘fresh milk’, and not with dairy products.

So they wouldn’t abstain from consuming, for example, fish with butter, cheese with salmon, etc.

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