

Kosher Pork

Rulings of Modern Pharisees

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 24-Mar-18; Sermon #1424c

Jews around the world may soon be dining on kosher pork. Yes, you heard me correctly—kosher pork. To those of us who keep God's laws of clean and unclean foods, these two words together— kosher pork—sound like an oxymoron, a self-contradictory term like "jumbo shrimp" and "bitter sweet" and "wise fool" and "pet cat"—because cats have pet humans, really. But nevertheless, a prominent Israeli orthodox Rabbi—a man by the name of Rabbi Yuval Cherlow—said earlier this week that meat from a genetically cloned pig would be kosher for consumption by Jews, including when eaten with dairy products, meaning that it does not fall under halachah laws separating meat and milk.

Essentially, he argues that cloned meat is not subject to God's laws that apply to the consumption of natural meat. Now here's what Cherlow says in his own words: "Cloned meat produced from a pig shall not be defined as prohibited for consumption including with milk." That was his statement of how he ruled on this. Now Cherlow, who is with the Tzohar Rabbinical Organization, seems to mean that meat grown artificially in a laboratory from the cells of a pig is edible, but not meat produced from live cloned pigs.

It's difficult to know for certain if this is exactly what he means, but the distinction seems plausible—that that's what he is getting at. In 2013, Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of the Orthodox Union's kosher division, said that meat from a lab grown hamburger could be consumed with dairy products, although halacha forbids it in meat produced from a live animal. I think this is probably where Cherlow is getting his distinction. However, Genack did not mention pork, just beef, as would be in a hamburger or maybe on a pizza or something. Cherlow's applying this to pig meat is an extraordinary step away from one of the strongest taboos in Judaism.

Why would this make any difference? To Cherlow, it appears the pig's natural—you might say— uncleanness derives from its eating and from its very inadequate and ineffective digestive system. Pig meat, to Cherlow, is unclean because the pig's digestive system does a very poor job—almost no job—of killing or removing bacteria, parasites, poisons, diseases or whatever from what it eats, and then these things—because the digestive system is not stopping any of it—eventually find their way into the pig's flesh.

A live *cloned* pig—one that you take the cells from a pig, you clone them, and you make

another real live pig that eats and does whatever pigs do—functions the same way as a natural pig. So a live cloned pig and a natural pig both eat, they both digest, and so they are both unclean. However, cloned meat or cloned muscle or cloned flesh—however you put it—from a pig, even though it is from a pig, never eats. It never digests and so it is not unclean, at least according to Rabbi Cherlow. That's his reasoning here. That's how he rationalizes it—here are his words:

When the cell of a pig is used and its genetic material is utilized in the production of food, the cell, in fact, loses its original identity and therefore cannot be defined as forbidden for consumption. It wouldn't even be meat, so you can consume it with dairy.

Now, he's just making things up as he goes, but that is what he said. He's saying that a cell separated from a pig and used to clone other cells just like it to make a meat patty or a muscle patty or a flesh patty or however you want to put it, making, I guess you could call it, artificial muscle. Anyway, that cell ceases to be pig, in his mind, even though the DNA of that cell, if it were taken out and analyzed, could still be identified as coming from a pig. He sounds like one of these transgender advocates, who are trying to tell us that a man could become a woman. Now he is telling us a pig could become something else other than pig.

Had he bothered to check God's laws about all of this, on this matter of clean and unclean things, in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 he would not have seen his reasoning anywhere in the law that he is supposedly interpreting.

Leviticus 11:4 Nevertheless these you shall not eat . . .

Leviticus 11:7 and the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.

Deuteronomy 14:8 Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses.

Then as we get toward the end of the Old Testament:

Isaiah 66:17 “Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the

abomination and the mouse, shall be consumed together," says the LOORD.

So you get through the whole of the Old Testament, and the law is the same. God's law seems clear: Eating swine or pig, bacon, pork—however you want to put it—is forbidden, period. There is no loophole for pigs that do not eat or pigs that do not digest. That is not even part of it. He says simply, "Do not eat the swine or the pig." God created the pig and He has not made them to be food for human beings. It is as simple as that. He made them for another purpose, and no amount of genetic manipulation or laboratory science changes the nature of the pig from what God made it to be—unclean.

What is interesting when you come down to it, though, is why Rabbi Cherlow advocates for rabbinic approval of cloned pork meat. Here are his own words: "So that people would not starve; to prevent pollution; and to avoid the suffering of animals." When the interviewer finally got him down to why he had made this interpretation and made it public, it came down to politics. He said, while there may be merit in prohibiting this meat, too, "halachic thought should examine the needs of all humanity not only one's own case." This is just a restating, in Jewish terms, of the often-nefarious progressive principle of the "greater good."

So, what did he say? Basically, in his own words he said, "Hey, I am a humanist. What is best for men in my own mind is what should be." Now, his reasons sound compassionate and oh-so rational, but in reality, they are simply political positions. Over here, he would be like most Jews—a liberal Democrat, a progressive.

Doesn't it seem that God's laws and principles always seem to get tossed out the window when there are conflicts between what He says and politics and politically correct notions? It has been that way from for millennia. From the very beginning, people do what they want to do, because they have their reasons. It does not matter what God's reasons are. They just do what they want to do. And here again, we see it from the mouth of a modern day Pharisee.