

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

181 - EXOTIC CREATURES AND KASHRUT

PART 4 - LOCUSTS

OU ISRAEL CENTER - SUMMER 2020

1. East Africa is seeing its worst swarms of locusts in many decades. How can these ravenous pests be stopped? The locust invasion that swept over farms in rural Kenya from December 2019 has left farmers not only counting crop losses, but struggling with emerging environmental and health problems.



The swarms have been the worst seen in Kenya for 70 years, and experts are concerned that swarms later in the year will be even larger. Desert locusts, or *Schistocerca gregaria*, have often been called the world's most devastating pest, and for good reason. Swarms form when locusts' numbers increase and they become crowded. This causes a switch from a relatively harmless solitary phase, to a gregarious, sociable phase. In this phase, the insects are able to multiply 20-fold in three months and reach densities of 80 million per square kilometre. Each can consume 2g of vegetation every day – combined, a swarm of 80 million can consume food equivalent to that eaten by 35,000 people a day. In 2020, locusts have swarmed in large numbers in dozens of countries¹, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia, Eritrea, India, Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Oman and Saudi Arabia. When swarms affect several countries at once in very large numbers, it is known as a plague.

The Biblical locust plagues of 2020, David Njagi 7th August 2020, [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com)²

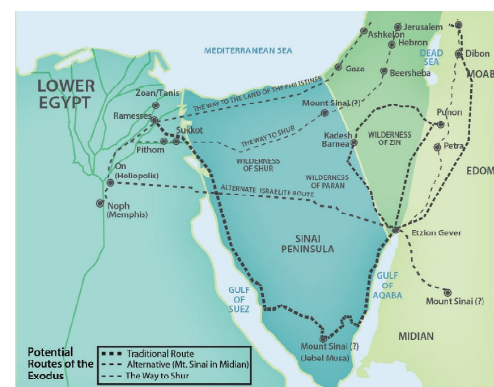
A] THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS IN SHEMOT

2. (ג) ויבא מִשֶּׁה וְאֶהְרֹן אֶל־פְּרָעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה־אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים עַד־מָתִי מֵאַנְתָּ לַעֲנֹת מִפְּנֵי שַׁלַּח עֲמִי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי: (ד) כִּי אִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי הַנִּלֵּי מִבְּיַד מִצְרַיִם בְּגִבְלָךְ: (ה) וְכִסָּה אֶת־עֵין הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאָכַל אֶת־יֵתֶר הַפִּלְטָה הַנִּשְׁאֶרֶת לָכֶם מִן־הַבֶּרֶד וְאָכַל אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ הַצֹּמַח לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה: (ו) וּמִלֵּאוּ בְּתֵיךְ וּבְתֵי כָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ וּבְתֵי כָל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֲבֹתֶיךָ מִיּוֹם־עַל־הָאָדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּכְן וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרָעֹה: (ז) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נֹטֶה יָדְךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאַרְבֶּה וַיַּעַל עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁאִיר הַבֶּרֶד: (ח) וַיֹּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מַטְהוֹ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה רֹחַ־מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְכָל־הַיָּם הָיָה וְרוּחַ הַקִּדִּים נָשָׂא אֶת־הָאַרְבֶּה: (ט) וַיַּעַל הָאַרְבֶּה עַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּלֵךְ בְּכָל־גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם כִּבְדֹּם מֵאֵד לְפָנָיו לֹא־הָיָה כֹּן אֶרְבֶּה כָּמֹהוּ וְאֶחָדוּם לֹא־יָהִי־כֵן: (י) וַיִּכֹּס אֶת־עֵין כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וַתִּחַשֶׁף הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־פְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הוֹתִיר הַבֶּרֶד וְלֹא־נוֹתֵר כְּלִי־יֶרֶק בְּעֵץ וּבְעֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (יא) וַיִּמְהַר פְּרָעֹה לִקְרֹא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר חֲטֹאתִי לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם: (יב) וַעֲתָה שָׂא נָא חֲטָאתִי אֵךְ הַפֹּעַם וְהַעֲתִירוּ לָהּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְיִסֹּר מֵעָלַי רַק אֶת־הַמָּוֶת הַזֶּה: (יג) וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרָעֹה וַיַּעֲתֶר אֶל־ה': (יד) וַיִּהְיֶה ה' רֹחַ־יָם חֲזָק מְאֹד וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־הָאַרְבֶּה וַיִּתְקַעֶנָּה יָמָה סוּף לֹא נִשְׁאַר אֶרְבֶּה אֶחָד בְּכָל־גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם:

שמות פרק י

The first, and most famous, appearance of locusts - arbeh - in the Torah is as the 8th of the 10 Plagues. Key points in this account are:

- the total devastation they wreak on plant life as they swarm into the land.
- the statements that there had never been such a swarm of locusts in Egypt in the past, and there would never be again in the future!
- they came from the East on the back on a east wind, and were carried back to the East by west wind, and dumped into the Red Sea.



1. In 1954, a swarm flew 5,000 km (3,000 miles) from Mauritania to the Caribbean in just 10 days.

2. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200806-the-biblical-east-african-locust-plagues-of-2020>

3. (יג) ורוח הקדים - רוח מזרחית נשא את הארצה, לפי שזא כנגדו שמלרים צדוומית מערבית היתה
(יט) רוח ים - רוח מערבי: ימה סוף - אומר אני שים סוף היה מקלחו צמערב כנגד כל רוח דרומית וגם צמזרח של ארץ ישראל, לפיכך רוח ים תקעו לארצה צימה סוף כנגדו.

רש"י שם

In terms of the direction of travel of the locusts, Rashi explains that Egypt is to the south-west of the Red Sea but the Red Sea is both to the east and to the west of Eretz Yisrael.

4. (יד) ואחריו לא יהיה כן - ואותו שכיב צימי יואל, שנאמר (יואל 3:3) פָּמָהוּ לָא נִהְיָה מִן-הַעוֹלָם, למדנו שכיב כזד משל משה. כי אותו של יואל היה על ידי מינין הרבה שכיו יחד - ארבה, ילק, חסיל, גזם. אבל של משה לא היה אלא של מין אחד, וכמוהו לא היה ולא יביה:

רש"י שם

Rashi raises the plague of Yoel Chapter 2, which says that there was never such a plague before! The reconciliation is that the plague in Shemot was of one species - arbeh, but the plague of Yoel was of four - arbeh, yelek, chasil and gezem.

B] THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS IN YOEL

5. **פרק א** (א) דבריה אשר הלה אל-יואל בן-פתואל: (ב) שמעו-זאת הזקנים והזאנים כל יושבי הארץ ההיתה זאת בימכם ואם בימי אבותיכם: (ג) עליה לבניכם ספרו ובניכם לבניהם לדור אחר: (ד) יתר הגזם אכל הארבה ויתר הארבה אכל הילק ויתר הילק אכל החסיל: (ה) הקיצו שכורים ובכו (ו) שדך שדה אכלה אדמה כי שדך דגן הוביש תירוש אמלל יצהר: (זא) הבישו אפרים הילילו פרמים על-חטה ועל-שערה כי אבד קציר שדה: (יב) הגפן הובישה והתאנה אמללה רמון גם-תמר ותפוח כל-עצי השדה יבשו כיהביש ששון מן-בני אדם: ס (יג) חגרו וספדו הכהנים הילילו משרתי מזבח באו לנו בשקים משרתי אלהי כי נמנע מבית אלהיכם מנחה ונסד: (יד) קדשו-צום קראו עצרה אספו זקנים כל יושבי הארץ בית ה' אלהיכם וזעקו אליה:
פרק ב (א) תקעו שופר בציון והרעו בחר קדשי ירגזו כל יושבי הארץ כי-בא יום-ה' כי קרוב: (ב) יום תשד ואפלה יום ענן וערפל פשח פרש על-ההרים עם רב ועצום כמזה לא נהיה מן-העולם ואחריו לא יוסף עד-שני דור ודור: (ג) לפניו אכלה אש ואחריו תלהט להבה כגור-עין הארץ לפניו ואחריו מדבר שממה וגם-פליטה לא-היתה לו: (ד) כמראה סוסים מראהו וכפרשים כן ירוצו: (ה) כקול מרכבות על-ראשי ההרים ירדון כקול להב אש אכלה קש פעם עצום ערוץ מלחמה: (ו) מפניו יחילו עמים כל-פנים קבצו פארו: (ז) כגבורים ירצו פאנשי מלחמה יעלו חומה ואיש בדרכיו ילכון ולא יעבטון אחרתם: (ח) ואיש אחיו לא ידחקון גבר במסלתו ילכון ובעד השלח יפלו לא יבצעו: (ט) בעיר יעשו בחומה ירצו בבתים יעלו בעד החלונות יבאו כגנב: (י) לפניו רגזה ארץ רעשו שמם שמש וירח קדרי וכוכבים אספו נגהם: (יב) וגם-עתה נאם-ה' שבו עדי בכל-לבבכם ובצום ובבכי ובמספד: (יג) וקראו לבבכם ואל-בגדיכם ושובו אליה אלהיכם כרחוק רחוק הוא ארץ אפלים ורחוק חסד ורחם על-הרעה: (יד) מי יודע ישוב ורחם והשאיר אחריו ברכה מנחה ונסד לה אלהיכם: פ (טו) תקעו שופר בציון קדשו-צום קראו עצרה: (טז) אספו-לכם קדשו קהל קבצו זקנים אספו עולים וינקי שדים יצא חתן מחדרו וכלה מחפתה:

וואל פרק א-ב

CHAPTER 1

1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel. 2 Listen to this, O elders, Give ear, all inhabitants of the land. Has the like of this happened in your days Or in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell your children about it, And let your children tell theirs, And their children the next generation! 4 What the cutter has left, the locust has devoured; What the locust has left, the grub has devoured; And what the grub has left, the hopper has devoured. 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep 10 The country is ravaged, The ground must mourn; For the new grain is ravaged, The new wine is dried up, The new oil has failed. 11 Farmers are dismayed And vine dressers wail Over wheat and barley; For the crops of the field are lost. 12 The vine has dried up, The fig tree withers, Pomegranate, palm, and apple— All the trees of the field are sear. And joy has dried up Among men. 13 Gird yourselves and lament, O priests, Wail, O ministers of the altar; Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God. For offering and libation are withheld From the House of your God. 14 Solemnize a fast, Proclaim an assembly; Gather the elders—all the inhabitants of the land— In the House of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.

CHAPTER 2

1 Blow a horn in Zion, Sound an alarm on My holy mount! Let all dwellers on earth tremble, For the day of the LORD has come! It is close— 2 A day of darkness and gloom, A day of densest cloud Spread like soot over the hills. A vast, enormous horde— Nothing like it has ever happened, And it shall never happen again Through the years and ages. 3 Their vanguard is a consuming fire, Their rear guard a devouring flame. Before them the land was like the Garden of Eden, Behind them, a desolate waste: Nothing has escaped them. 4 They have the appearance of horses, They gallop just like steeds. 5 With a clatter as of chariots They bound on the hilltops, With a noise like a blazing fire Consuming straw; Like an enormous horde Arrayed for battle. 6 Peoples tremble before them, All faces turn ashen. 7 They rush like warriors, They scale a wall like fighters. And each keeps to his own track. Their paths never cross; 8 No one jostles another, Each keeps to his own course. And should they fall through a loophole, They do not get hurt. 9 They rush up the wall, They dash about in the city; They climb into the houses, They enter like thieves By way of the windows. 10 Before them earth trembles, Heaven shakes, Sun and moon are darkened, And stars withdraw their brightness. 12 "Yet even now" says the LORD "Turn back to Me with all your hearts, And with fasting, weeping, and lamenting." 13 Rend your hearts Rather than your garments, And turn back to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in kindness, And renouncing punishment. 14 Who knows but He may turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind For meal offering and drink offering To the LORD your God? 15 Blow a horn in Zion, Solemnize a fast, Proclaim an assembly! 16 Gather the people, Bid the congregation purify themselves. Bring together the old, Gather the babes And the sucklings at the breast; Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, The bride from her canopied couch.

In Sefer Yoel, the focus is not merely on the disaster of the locust, but on the need for fasting, prayer³ and teshuva.

3. Note Melachim 1 8:37 where Shlomo specifically mentions two types of locust plague - arbeh and chasil - as a catalyst that will bring people to turn to God in prayer.

C] MODERN LOCUST PLAGUES IN ERETZ YISRAEL

In modern times, locust swarms have struck and continue to strike Eretz Yisrael roughly once a decade, although advanced pesticides have reduced the threat.⁴

- 1827 Locusts plague the land of Israel
- 1838 Locusts in the Galilee
- 1845 A swarm takes forty-five minutes to fly over Jerusalem
- 1865 Arabs declare "the year of the locust" after a particularly severe plague. Jewish communities fast.
- 1892 Jericho smitten
- 1899 Locusts return to the Galilee
- 1904 Locusts ravage the Negev
- 1915 March - October: Plague of the century hits countrywide. Jewish communities around world fast. Up to 30,000 die from starvation. Turkish rulers appoint agronomist Aaron Aaronson of Zichron Yaakov to help control damage.⁵
- 1928 More locusts
- 1945 Smaller swarms sighted mostly in the Jordan Valley
- 1955 First spraying of locusts over the western Negev as far as Tel Aviv
- 1988 African locust swarm stops in Jordan
- 2004 Egyptian locusts arrive in southern Israel and are destroyed from the air
- 2013 Swarms cross the border from Egypt and spread to Tel Aviv. Despite aerial spraying, locusts pose a grave agricultural threat.

D] WHY LEARN ABOUT THE KASHRUT OF LOCUSTS?

6. להבדיל בין הטמא ובין הטהור ובין החיה הנאכלת ובין החיה אשר לא תאכל: פ

ויקרא יא:מו

The laws of kashrut in Shemini end with an imperative to distinguish between that which is and is not kosher.

7. מצות עשה לידע הסימנים שמבדילין בהן בין בהמה וחיה ועוף ודגים וחגבים שמוותר לאכלן, ובין שאין מותר לאכלן. שנאמר (ויקרא כי:ה) וְהַבְדִּילְתֶּם בֵּין הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה לַטְּמֵאָה וּבֵין הָעוֹף הַטָּמֵא לַטְּהוֹרָה. וְנֹאמַר (ויקרא יא:מו) לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטְּהוֹרָה וּבֵין הַחַיָּה הַנֹּאכֶלֶת וּבֵין הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכַל.

רמב"ם הלכות מאכלות אסורות פרק א הלכה א

The Rambam understands that it is a positive Torah mitzva to know these kashrut distinctions!

8. והמצוה הקנ"א היא שצונו לבדוק בסימני חגבים

ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה קנא

There is also a specific positive mitzva to check the differences between kosher and non kosher locusts, not merely a negative mitzva not to eat treif ones.

- R. Chaim Kanievsky⁶ writes that, even though we do not eat locusts, there is still a positive mitzva to study and know their halachot!

E] THE KASHRUT OF LOCUSTS - TORAH

9. לא נשאר ארבה אחד - אף כמלוחים שמלחו מהם:

רש"י שמות י"ט

The Torah stresses that not one locust remained in Egypt after the plague. Rashi writes that this even included those that the Egyptians had pickled as food!

4. See <http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/kosher-locusts-Segula-2013.pdf> as to the terrible locust plague of 1915.
5. Aaronson was already in the process of forming the underground organization, Nili, which worked against the Ottomans during WW I. His work on the plague relief, with Avshalom Feinberg, gave them permission to move freely around the country, which enabled them to collect strategic information about Ottoman military camps and troop deployments. (Feinberg was killed by Arabs close of Rafah, near Gaza. Famously, his fate was unknown until after the 1967 Six-Day War when his remains were found under a palm tree that had grown from date seeds in his pocket to mark the spot where he lay!)
6. Karnei Chagav p104. There is a story told about Rav Kanievsky and grasshoppers. Around 20 years ago R. Kanievsky was learning the sugya relating to locusts in mesechet Chullin. He realized that he needed to see a grasshopper to better understand the Gemara and asked his daughter to bring him one. She tried, but reported to her father that she failed to find one. He went back to his learning and a grasshopper came through the window and landed on his Gemara. After examining it, he let it go. As he continued through the sugya, he realized that he needed to study the hind legs further, but the grasshopper was long gone. A second grasshopper hopped in and on to his Gemara, giving him the ability to study its hind legs in detail. Later, it is reported that, even when he did renovations in his home, R. Chaim refused to knock down the wall on which the episode of the grasshopper took place.
7. Chazal also refer to the preparation of locust boiled, or pickled in salt or vinegar (Tanchuma Va-yera, 14; Shemot Rabba 13: 7; Avodah Zarah 40b). Locusts were pickled in special barrels known as *gevonta* from the word *govay* – locusts.

- Locusts have always been seen as food⁸ in many cultures, especially during plagues.⁹

10. (כא) אֲדָא אֶת־זֶה תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל שָׂרֵץ הָעוֹף הַחַדָּל עַל־אֲרֶבֶע אֲשֶׁר־[לא] לוֹ כַּרְעִים מִמַּעַל לְרַגְלָיו לְנִתֵּר בֵּהֶן עַל־הָאָרֶץ: (כב) אֶת־אַלֶּה מֵהֶם תֹאכְלוּ אֶת־הָאֲרֶבֶה לְמִינֹהוּ וְאֶת־הַחֲרָגָל לְמִינֹהוּ וְאֶת־הַחֲגָב לְמִינֹהוּ: (כג) וְכָל שָׂרֵץ הָעוֹף אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֲרֶבֶע רַגְלִים שֶׁקֶץ הוּא לָכֶם:

ויקרא יא כא-כג

The only flying insects with four walking legs that you may eat are those which have knees extending above their feet, [using these longer legs] to hop on the ground. Among these, you may [only] eat members of the red locust family, the yellow locust family, the spotted grey locust family, and the white locust family. All other flying insects with four feet [for walking] must be avoided by you.¹⁰

The Torah prohibits all flying creatures that walk on four legs EXCEPT for four species of locusts - arbeh, salam, chargol and chagav. R. Aryeh Kaplan simply translates them as red, yellow, spotted grey and white locusts.

F] THE KASHRUT OF LOCUSTS - TALMUD

- Throughout the Talmudic period¹¹, it is clear kosher locusts were on the menu. Chazal gave signs as to how to distinguish them from the non-kosher species.

11. ובחגבים - כל שיש לו ארבע רגלים, וארבע כנפים, וקרוסולים, וכנפיו חופין את רובו. רבי יוסי אומר ושמו 'חגב'

משנה מסכת חולין פרק ג משנה ז

The Mishna gives five signs for kosher locusts. (i) 4 legs; (ii) 4 wings; (iii) 'karsulayim'; (iv) wings which cover the majority of the body; (v) R. Yosi adds that the species must colloquially be called 'locust'.

12. (צא) וקרוסולים. הן רגלים ארוכים, שחלזד הדי רגלים יש לו עוד צ' רגלים סמוך לזואר, שכשילדג יתחזק ח"ע צבן:

תפארת ישראל - יבין מסכת חולין פרק ג משנה ז

The karsulayim are the two strong legs which it uses to jump (as opposed to the other four legs used for walking).



8. See *Eating locusts: The crunchy, kosher snack taking Israel by storm*, 21 March 2013 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21847517>. An adult desert locust is about sixty-two percent protein and seventeen percent fat. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 65a and 90b) also mentions that children used to play with locusts, and describes locust eggs as a cure for earaches.

9. When Australia was hit by swarms in 2004, they were re-branded "sky prawns" to encourage people to eat, or at least control, them.

10. Translation of R. Aryeh Kaplan - available on <http://bible.ort.org/books/pentd2.asp>

11. In fact, we have clear evidence of their consumption during the Second Temple period. Note Matthew 3:4 where John the Baptist survives in Midbar Yehuda on locusts (desert or dessert locusts?) and wild honey. Even earlier, the *Berit Damesek* scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls quotes the following rule: "And all of the grasshoppers of their kinds shall be brought in fire or water while still alive for this is the law of their creation." Damascus Document XII

The Gemara gives various halachic rules as to which locusts are kosher:

RULE 1 - WINGS COVER MOST OF LENGTH AND CIRCUMFERENCE OF BODY

13. מאי רוב? אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: רוב ארכו, ואמרי לה: רוב הקיפו. אמר רב פפא: הלכך, בעינן רוב ארכו, ובעינן רוב הקיפו. חולין סה.

Since there is a question as to whether the wings must cover most of the length or circumference of the body, we require both.

RULE 2 - YOUNG LOCUSTS ARE KOSHER EVEN BEFORE THEY GROW LARGE LEGS AND/OR WINGS

14. ת"ר: אין לו עכשיו ועתיד לגדל לאחר זמן, כגון הזחל - מותר. ר"א בר' יוסי אומר: אֶשְׁרֵי-לֵא [כָּרְעִים] - אף על פי שאין לו עכשיו ועתיד לגדל לאחר זמן. חולין סה.

The young locust has no wings, but will develop them. Chazal learn from the wording of the Torah that juvenile locusts are still kosher, even before they develop wings or legs¹².

Eggs: Female locusts lay their eggs in the ground, most commonly in hard, firm soil. The eggs are deposited into the ground in groups of approximately 50. These groups are known as 'pods' and they can be deposited up to 4 inches underground. A female locust will lay anywhere between one and three egg pods at one time.

Nymphs: The locust eggs generally hatch about two weeks after they were laid. These baby locusts are referred to as 'hoppers' or 'nymphs.' Over the next month to two months after hatching, the nymph locusts go through five molting stages called 'instars'. After the fifth instar, the locust's wings are fully developed.

Fledglings: After the fifth molt, the locusts are called 'fledglings'. The fledglings cannot fly yet. Their bodies take approximately seven days to harden and become capable of flight.

Adults: It takes approximately two weeks for the fledgling locust to reach sexual maturity. Adults often group together into swarms containing thousands of locusts. Adult locusts typically live about 10 weeks. During that time, they mate and the females lay eggs.



RULE 3 - IDENTIFICATION

• The Gemara takes an entire daf - Chulin 65a-66a - to discuss the identification of kosher locusts, discussing various signs, including length of head and tail. In the end, the Gemara derives the 4 rules mentioned in the Mishna.

15. מה ת"ל 'למינ' 'למינה' 'למינה' ד' פעמים? להביא ציפורת כרמים, ויוחנא ירושלמית, והערצוביא, והרזבנית. חולין סה.

Chazal learn from the repetition in the Torah of 'species' four times, that there are four further kosher sub-species of locust - the 'vineyard bird', the Jerusalem yochana, the artzuveya, and the razbanit.

• It also lists many different Aramaic names of locusts to identify them and includes their related species. It concludes that different localities use different names to describe the kosher species, so name alone is not definitive.

12. Locusts are born without wings, but they do have all six legs. For a sweet old video on the life-cycle of a locust, narrated by Jonny Morris, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cV3zN_-iTMo

16. כל הבשר אסור לבשל בחלב - מהן מדברי תורה, ומהן מדברי סופרים. חוץ מבשר דגים וחגבים - שאינם לא מדברי תורה ולא מדברי סופרים.

חולין קד.

The Gemara¹³ states that locusts, like fish, are parev and can be cooked with milk (and, in the case of locusts, with meat.)

G] LOCUSTS AS A BERACHA AND A CURSE

17. על אלו מתריעין בכל מקום - על השדפון ועל הירקון על הארבה ועל החסיל ועל החיה רעה ועל החרב. מתריעין עליה מפני שהיא מכה מהלכת:

משנה מסכת תענית פרק ג משנה ה

The Mishna confirms the status of locust - arbeh and chasil - as a terrible plague which requires us to blow shofar and declare a series of public fasts.

18. רבי עקיבא אומר ארבה וחסיל - אפילו לא נראה בארץ ישראל אלא כנף אחד מתריעין עליהן.

תענית כב.

Rabbi Akiva ruled that even the appearance of ONE flying locust could be the harbinger of a plague, and the community should begin immediately to fast!

19. על דבר שאין גדולו מן הארץ אומר שהכל. על החומץ ועל הנובלות ועל הגובאי אומר שהכל. ר' יהודה אומר כל שהוא מין קללה אין מברכין עליו. (ר' עובדיה מצרנטורה - נוצלות וגובאי ע"י קללה כן צאים, ואין הלכה כר"י)

משנה מסכת ברכות פרק ו משנה ג

Nevertheless, the Mishna rules that one must say a beracha - shehakol - when eating locusts. R. Yehuda's view is that, since they usually come as a plague, they should not receive a beracha¹⁴. This is not however the halacha.

H] THE KASHRUT OF LOCUSTS - RISHONIM

H1] SHECHITA

20. דגים וחגבים אינן צריכים שחיטה אלא אסיפתן היא המתרת אותן ובחגבים נאמר (ישעיהו לג:ד) אֶסְף הַחֲסִיל - באסיפה לבדה. לפיכך אם מתו מאיליהן בתוך המים מותרין, ומותר לאכלן [ג] חיים.

רמב"ם הלכות שחיטה פרק א הלכה ג

Locusts (and fish) do not require shechita, but simply 'gathering in'¹⁵. Rambam rules that, even if they die naturally, they are still kosher. Furthermore, the Rambam seems to indicate that they may even be eaten while they are still alive!!

21. [ג] כן איתא בזה"ש ריש פרק דתמורה. והביאו רבינו שמשון - אוכל חגבים זין חיים זין שחוטין. ואוכל לאו דוקא דהא איכא זל תשקף כדאמר פ' ר"ע. אלא כלומר אם אכלן חיים אין כאן אבר מן החי שכרי אינן טעונין שחיטה ע"כ:

הגהות מיימוניות הלכות שחיטה פרק א הלכה ג

The Hagoth Maimoniot clarifies that it is NOT permitted to eat them while alive due to Bal Teshaktzu - not to do anything disgusting. It simply means that eating them alive is not a prohibition of ever min hachai.¹⁶

13. Quoting Misna Chulin 8:1.

14. Some commentators understand that, according to the opinion of R. Yehuda, one would have to make a shehakol on some other food and include the locust, since one may not benefit from this world without making a beracha.

15. They are often killed in boiling water, in the stove, or the freezer. Traditionally they were rounded up when stationary on the ground in the cool desert night.

16. As to the issue of tzar ba'alei chayim, some commentators understand that this does not apply to insects when there is a purpose to treating them in this way. R. Yaakov Emden (She'eilat Yaavetz 1:110) rules that tzar ba'alei chayim applies only to animals large enough to be worked by humans. He quotes the opinion of the Arizal that one should not kill even insects, as a middat chasidut. R. Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe CM 2:47) rules that it is permitted to kill insects when necessary for human purposes, but that one should try to avoid killing the creatures directly if possible.

H2] IDENTIFICATION

22. **כא** ומיני חגבים שהתירה תורה **שמונה** - ואלו הן: (א) חגב (ב) מין חגב - והוא הרזבנית (ג) חרגול (ד) ומין חרגול - והוא ערצוביא (ה) ארבה (ו) ומין ארבה - והיא צפורת כרמים (ז) סלעם (ח) ומין סלעם - והיא יוחנא ירושלמית **כב** מי שהוא בקי בהן ובשמותיהן, אוכל. והצייד נאמן עליהן כעוף. ומי שאינו בקי בהן בודק בסימנין. ושלשה סימנין יש בהן: כל שיש לו ארבע רגלים, וארבע כנפים שחופות רוב אורך גופו ורוב הקף גופו, ויש לו שני כרעים לנתר בהם - הרי זה מין טהור. ואף על פי שראשו ארוך ויש לו זנב אם היה שמו חגב טהור. **כג** מי שאין לו עכשיו כנפים או כרעים או שאין לו כנפים החופין את רובו ועתיד לגדל אותן אחר זמן כשיגדיל הרי זה מותר מעתה.

רמב"ם הלכות מאכלות אסורות פרק א הלכה כא

The Rambam names all **eight** species of kosher locusts - the 4 in the Torah and their corresponding related species. Someone who recognizes them can eat them based on that knowledge. Otherwise they need to check for the signs - 4 legs +2 to jump, 4 wings covering most of length and circumference. Even if it has a long head or a tail, this is fine as long as it is called 'locust'.

23. **ממעל לרגליו** - סמוך לזוהרו יש לו כמין שתי רגלים לצד ארבע רגליו. וכשרואה לעוף ולקפץ מן הארץ מתחזק בזה שתי כרעים ופורה. ויש הרבה מהם במקומינו צינתינו, כחותן שקורין לנגושט"א (langosta¹⁷) [ארצה]. **אצל אין אנו צקיאים צפן**, שארבעה סימני טהרה נאמרו בהם ארבע רגלים, וארבע כנפים, וקרסולין אלו כרעים הכתוצים כאן, וכנפיו חופין את רצו. וכל סימנים הללו מלויין בזה שצינתינו, אצל יש שראשן ארוך ויש שאין להם זנב ולריך שיכא שמו חגב. **וצזה אין אנו יודעים להבדיל ציניהם**.

רש"י ויקרא יא:כא

Rashi states that, although there were many species of kosher locusts in his times, the Ashkenazi community no longer had the expertise to identify the kosher species.

24. כתוב חית על לבו מפני שהוא חילו שלמקום שנ' (ויאל ב:כה) [הַאֲרָאָה הַיֵּלֶק וְהַחֲסִיל וְהַגִּזָּם] חילי הגדול אֲשֶׁר שֶׁלֶחֶתִי בָכֶם:

מדרש הגדול שמות י"ז

The Midrash HaGadol - a 14th Century Yemenite collection - states that the kosher locust has a letter 'chet' written on its heart.



25. The aforementioned locust has a specific feature on its chest – on some are stamped the letter 'chet' like this: ח and on others are stamped the letter 'tet' like this: ט. Those that have a 'tet' on them one must avoid eating, for they say that this is a feature of impurity, but those that have a 'het' on them one may eat, for they say that this indicates that it is called 'locust' [chagav] and it is a kosher variety.

R. Shimon Bekhor Yaakov, 1694

17. Early French and modern Spanish for locust. Rashi states that jumping legs of the kosher locust are 'close to its neck'. Some later authorities (such as the Ohr HaChaim) argued on this basis that locust Rashi is describing must be different from the ones we have today, whose jumping legs are further back. However, given that Rashi identifies them as langosta, and also that there are no known locusts with jumping legs 'close to their head', Rashi must be read differently (perhaps that the legs begin close to the neck).

26. This generally refers to the 'het' shape which is found on the upper portion of the locust's breast plates (meso-metasternum), but there is also a similar shape found on the lower chest. The 'het' shape is like an imprinted letter is easily and clearly visible, especially in the adolescent phase ... The 'het' shape can be seen on the locust when one holds it vertically towards the floor, so that when the locust is in a horizontal orientation, the shape looks like a 'kaf'. Some see in this feature a reference to the word 'kasher'. In Yemen, some explained that the 'het' shape indicates 'herem', since locusts destroy or eradicate the crops. In Morocco and Algeria, some reasoned that the letter 'het' hints to the Arabic word 'halal', which means 'permitted' – fit for consumption.

Zohar Amar, *The Locust in Jewish Tradition*¹⁸, pp. 151-2

I] EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY MINHAGIM ON LOCUSTS

27. א סימני חגבים - כל שיש לו ד' רגלים וד' כנפים, וכנפיו חופין את רוב אורך גופו ורוב היקפו, ויש לו שני כרעים לנתר (פי' לקפץ ולכעתיק ממקום למקום) בהם. ואפילו אין לו עכשיו, ועתיד לגדלם לאחר זמן. ואף על פי שיש בו כל הסימנים הללו, אינו מותר אלא אם כן שמו חגב או שיש להם מסורת ששמו חגב.
ב חגבים אינם טעונים שחיטה.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות בהמה וחיה טהורה סימן פה סימני חגבים

The Shulchan Aruch records the simanim for kosher locus, as set out in the Rambam. There is no indication in the Mechaber, or in the Rema that there is a halachic prohibition on eating them today.

I1] ASHKENAZIM

- We saw above that the Ashkenazim stopped eating locusts by the early medieval period. Discussion in the writings of the halachic authorities of Europe reveals a gradual process of erosion in the tradition of identifying locusts for the purpose of eating them.¹⁹
- The Meiri²⁰ confirms that in 13C Provence²¹ the custom was also not to eat them, although states that they were eaten in Spain.

28. אא"כ שמו חגב כו'. ועכשיו נוכחין שלא לאכול שום חגב אפי' בידוע ששמו חגב לפי שאין לנו בקיאים בשמותיהם.

ט"ז יורה דעה סימן פה:א

The Taz (17C Poland) writes that the Ashkenazi custom is not to eat any locusts, even if called 'chagav' since we are not experts in their names.

I2] SPAIN

- In 13C Spain, the Rishonim write that some locations eat locusts, based on mesora, and some do not.²² It seems that it was less common for people to eat them based purely on their simanim.

I3] NORTH AFRICA

- The tradition from Spain to eat certain locusts past to N. Africa, where locusts were eaten up to the 17C²³. However, in the mid 18C, R. Chayim ben Atar prohibited²⁴ the eating of locusts in Morocco.

29. יש מינים הרבה ודאי ואינם מצויים כל עיקר אצלנו, לכן כל ירא וחרד ירא ויפחד לבל יושיט ידו לשקץ זה, וימחה בשולחן יד. והנה מיום שנשמעו דברי במערב ופירשו מהם הרבים לא נגע ה' עוד במכה זו ולא נראו זה יותר מ"ב שנה, כי תורה ומעשים טובים כתרס בפני הפורענות:

אור החיים ויקרא יא:כא

*The Or Hachaim writes that he prohibited the consumption of locusts and he felt that, in the merit of that act, the community was saved from future locust plagues.*²⁵

18. *Ha'arbe BeMesoret Yisrael*, Bar Ilan University Press, Zohar Amar, 2004 - http://www.biupress.co.il/website_en/index.asp?id=278

19. See *The Eating of Locusts in Jewish Tradition After the Talmudic Period* - Zohar Amar, *The Torah u-Madda Journal* (11/2002-03) - available at https://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/TU11_Amar.pdf

20. Beit HaBechira on Chullin 65.

21. See also Ralbag on Vayikra 11:22.

22. See Ran Chullin 23a, Chidushei HaRashba Chullin 65a.

23. See in particular the writings of R. Shimon and R. Zemach Duran, sons of R. Shlomo ben Shimon Duran, *Sefer Yachin u'Boaz* (Livorno, 1781), A, par. 64.

24. Peri To'ar YD 85:1.

25. It is interesting to note that, although the language of the Rishonim is fairly apologetic as to why locusts are not eaten - lack of mesora or expertise, the Acharonim are more strident

• Although there were other poskim in N. Africa who strongly defended the minhag²⁶ there to eat locusts, the psak of the Ohr Hachaim became very influential amongst the Sefardim and was largely responsible for the cessation of the consumption of locusts.²⁷

I4] YEMEN

- Nevertheless, the Jews of Yemen maintained that tradition²⁸ and it was practiced widely amongst them when the community came to Israel in 1949. The tradition for *arbeh* was the strongest - *al j'rad* in Arabic. This is usually identified as the desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*²⁹) which swarms³⁰. The identification of the other species was less clear and it is thought that they refer to species which do not swarm.
- Yemenite Jews in Israel were eating locusts up to recent times.

J] WHO CAN EAT LOCUSTS TODAY?

- Clearly, Yemenites with a strong tradition are permitted to eat locusts that are understood to be kosher within that tradition.
- Can Jews WITHOUT a tradition now eat locusts, based on the assurances of those WITH a tradition.

30. אם שאר מקומות שאין להם מסורת יכולים לאכול על סמך מקום שיש להם מסורת, יש מי שאוסר ויש מי שמתיר. ויש לחוש לדברי האוסר.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות בהמה וחיה טהורה סימן פב סעיף ה

On the question of whether a community without a mesora (here relating to birds) can rely on one that can, the Shulchan Aruch brings two opinions - that this is permitted (Rosh) and that it is prohibited (Rashba) - and inclines to the stringent view.

- On that basis, it would seem that Ashkenazim cannot rely on the Yemenite tradition.
- However, many of the later poskim understand that there may not be a machloket on this issue in many cases. First, it may only relate to a community going against its previous mesora, rather than an individual. Secondly, it may only apply in the case of a negative mesora - where a community has a custom NOT to eat something, as opposed to a neutral position based on the reality that they did not have access to this bird.

31. מי שהוא במקום שנוהגין איסור בעוף אחד מפני שאין להם מסורת, והלך למקום שאוכלים אותו מפני שיש להם מסורת יכול הוא ג"כ לאכול שם, אפילו דעתו לחזור למקומו. ואין כאן משום חומרי מקום שיצא משם. שהרי מה שאין אוכלין אותו במקומו לא מפני שאומרים שהוא אסור אלא שמודים שהוא מותר, ורק מפני שאין להם מסורת ובלא מסורת אין אנו אוכלין. וכיון שהוא עתה במקום שיש להם מסורת למה לא יאכלם?

ערוך השולחן יורה דעה סימן פב סעיף לב

The Aruch Hashulchan rules that an individual with no specific mesora on a bird, and who will therefore not normally eat it, is permitted to eat it when in a another location where they DO have a mesora. This is because those who abstain do not rule it to be treif, but simply refrain from eating it due to lack of knowledge. If however, there is a specific reason why a person would NOT eat a bird, they cannot rely on another mesora to do so³¹.

32. ועכשיו אנו נוהגין שלא לאכול שום חגב אפילו בכל הסימנים ואפילו ידוע ששמו חגב [ט"ז ס"ק א]. ומימינו לא שמענו שיהא מקום שאוכלין בו חגבים:

ערוך השולחן יורה דעה סימן פה:

In the case of locusts, the Aruch HaShulchan rules that there indeed a minhag NOT to eat locusts. Indeed, he had never heard of anyone actually eating them!

about the importance of avoiding them.

26. The communities which bordered the Sahara were more likely to eat locusts, since this was a far more important food source there.

27. See Prof Amar's article for a detailed analysis of the development of the North African minhag. Some North African Jews are reported as eating locusts in Israel as recently as 1956.

28. Interestingly, the Karaite and Samaritans had also lost the tradition of eating locusts by the Middle Ages. Most of the Ethiopian communities did NOT eat locusts.

29. This is by far the most common species of locust, which occasionally appears in swarms in Egypt and Israel even today.

30. Rav Yosef Kapach describes from his childhood in Yemen how, at sunset, the locusts would settle in for the night, lying motionless on the ground. Waking before dawn, the children would rouse the Muslim guard to unlock the city gates, so they could go out to gather locusts before the swarm took off. There were competitions to see who could collect the most, and sometimes the youngsters would tie a slender thread to one of the insects and let it fly about, whizzing around their heads like a toy airplane on a string. See <http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/kosher-locusts-Segula-2013.pdf>

31. For more details see Shiur 179 on the kashrut of turkey.

- Some Ashkenazi and Sefardi rabbis will allow those without a tradition to rely on the tradition of those who do.
- R. Yosef Kafach and R. Shlomo Korach were³² lenient even for Ashkenazim.

33. It is clear to me that the lack of a tradition amongst the Ashkenazim and Sephardim as to their kashrut is not because they had a tradition to prohibit them, but rather that they were not found in their countries, and therefore they lacked this delicacy and did not taste it. It appears to me that they can absolutely rely upon the testimony of the Yemenite community ... for according to the halachah, it suffices that there be a tradition that it is kosher and that its name is chagav ... it appears to me that everything I have written on this topic suffices for every Jew.

R. Yosef Kafach - Letter to Dr. Zohar Amar, Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5758

34. Since, according to the basic law, locusts are permitted in a case where they possess the signs, if so then in a place where they were prohibited, it was not because they knew that it was prohibited, but rather due to the lack of tradition ... I have written all this to create a kal v'chomer regarding locusts for one who wishes to rely upon our tradition, which was preserved for us from generation to generation from the days of the prophets until today. And even though it is not a delicacy, and those that were poorer used them more, let us grant them that due to this, the Torah was preserved for Israel through their hands. And it is possible that today, when there is so much investigation, it will be found that they have health benefits and similar, and they will have a source to rely upon, and this will be our reward.

Rabbi Shlomo Korach, Arichat HaShulchan III, p. 139³³

- R. Zalman Nechemia Goldberg was stringent for Ashkenazim, as was R. Menashe Klein.
- R. Moshe Sternbuch³⁴ has ruled leniently for Ashkenazim provided there is a strong and reliable tradition among a different segment of the community.
- Most kashrut authorities (whether Ashkenazi or Sefardi) will NOT permit locusts to be served under their supervision, although there are poskim associated with these organizations who will permit their consumption privately.

35. I recently heard of a Yemenite medical student in a United States university, devoutly orthodox, who attended a laboratory class where locusts were being dissected. He told the instructor, a Jewish biologist, that the creatures were of an edible variety; and he pointed to a distinguishing mark, the Hebrew letter *ches* clearly marked on the insect's abdomen. He proceeded to prove that they were edible and kosher (as least so far as he was concerned) by eating a few. I asked a rabbinic authority whether this conduct was acceptable. Perfectly, the answer was; based on the Talmud rule, "He has a continuous tradition from his fathers." I gather that if I caught a grasshopper with a *ches* on its abdomen it would not be an available morsel for me, since I have no such tradition. I submit to this deprivation with fortitude.

Herman Wouk, This is My God: the Jewish Way of Life, endnote

32. Rav Korach (d. 2018) was the Chief Rabbi of Bnei Brak. He was born in Yemen and was one of the foremost Yemenite poskim.

33. Translated and quoted on <https://www.biblicalnaturalhistory.org/locust/>

34. Rav Sternbuch is quoted in written sources as prohibiting Ashkenazim from eating locusts, but he has permitted this verbally.

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