

## Ratatou-Oil

Last week I wrote about the idea of bittul, where we say that a flavour is nullified where its presence cannot be detected in a mixture. In this week's Lunch and Learn we looked at another factor where flavouring affects kashrut in a wonderful Tshuva of the Rashbash (Rabbi Shlomo ben Shimon Duran), who lived in Algeria in the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Rashbash was asked about a barrel of oil which was intended for the lamps in the local shul. One morning the gabbai looked in the barrel and found that a mouse had drowned in it. God-fearing fellow that he was, he sealed the barrel and determined that it was not fitting to use the oil for the shul lamps. He bolstered his decision with the possuk from Malachi (1,8) "When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty."

The Gabbai was challenged on the basis that the oil was still kosher and edible. Surely if it was good enough for people to eat it ought to be fine for lighting the lamps.

The Rashbam's answer opens with a principle from the Gaonim that anything that's fit to eat can be used for lighting and that anything which is not kosher for eating is prohibited for lighting. So what is the status of our oil?

Here, the other flavour factor is introduced.

When the additional treif component doesn't improve the flavour of the mixture, rather it diminishes it / makes it less tasty, we call it "noten taam lifgam" / giving a deleterious flavour. Additives which detract from the flavour are unwelcome – but even if the rancid flavour can be detected, that doesn't make it treif. It is only in cases of "*noten taam lishvach*" (a flavour which improves on the original) that we need to nullify it with 60 so that it is undetected.

The Rashbash notes (and I am happy to take his word for it) that in oil, the mouse detracts from its flavour and therefore the oil is permitted. However, (and again I am happy not to try this) in vinegar or pickling, the decomposing mouse might be in an improvement. Accordingly olive oil lightly suffused by rodent can be used on a salad (please don't!) whereas murine vinegar cannot be put on your fish and chips. (As mentioned last week, one is not allowed to deliberately contrive a bittul situation just to savour the fact of nullified *issur*).

Accordingly, the Rashbash allows the oil for eating and by extension for lighting the shul lamps, with the proviso that it is strained to ensure that no physical rodent remnants are present.

The thought of a decomposing snail in Mrs Donoghue's ginger pop might make us retch... but then apparently the Mezcal worm is popular in the eponymous Mexican beverage (not, as some think, tequila.) If it benefits the flavour (not just to the shock per shot value) it would certainly be treif. If it detracts from the flavour, the worm would still need to be removed before downing the liquid.

This idea of "noten taam lifgam" – an unwelcome and deleterious addition to the flavour of our endproduct is used extensively in halacha. We assume that yesterday's cuisine tastes worse than whatever we are cooking fresh today. Accordingly, one of the essential details we normally need to know when the wrong pot or pan or plate is used is when it was used previously. Is the flavour which it imparts one which enhances or detracts?