TUNAS AND FLATFISHES:

- UNCLEAN -

TUNAS AND FLATFISHES: UNCLEAN

By George Lujack

Most Jewish rabbinical authorities have determined that tunas, other scombrid fish (bonito, mackerel, wahoo), and flatfishes (brill, flounder, fluke, halibut, megrim, plaice, skate, sole, and turbot) are clean kosher fish. This article will challenge that determination, arguing the case against tunas and flatfishes being classified as clean kosher fish, and will declare them UNCLEAN.

Most Jewish kosher certification authorities state that in order for a fish to be Scripturally clean and kosher, it must have fins and scales. They have ALSO determined that the types of scales that clean kosher fish must have are clenoid or cycloid scales that can be easily removed with fingers OR A KNIFE without causing damage to the skin (kaskeses) of the fish. They have ALSO determined that a fish with ANY AMOUNT of scales, even just a few minute or microscopic scales, is considered a scaled fish.

Jewish rabbinical authorities have classified tunas, other scombrid fish (bonito, mackerel, wahoo), and flatfishes (flounder, fluke, halibut, plaice, sole and turbot) as clean fish, based on the fact that these fish have some type of clenoid or cycloid scales on their bodies.

<u>DEUTERONOMY 14:9-10 & LEVITICUS 11:9-12</u>:
These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins AND SCALES. And whatever does not have fins AND SCALES you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

LOST IN TRANSLATION
The English word ‘scales’ is translated from the Hebrew word ‘qasqeseth’ in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Qasqeseth refers to specific types of fish scales in Hebrew. Qasqeseth means the imbricated (overlapping) scales of fish [1].

With a Hebrew knowledge of qasqeseth-specific type fish scales, the dietary commands for clean fish translated to English should be understood as:

<u>DEUTERONOMY 14:9-10 & LEVITICUS 11:9-12</u>:
These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins AND [OVERLAPPING, SHEDDING] SCALES. And whatever does not have fins AND [OVERLAPPING, SHEDDING] SCALES you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

Scripture describes scales (or something like scales), as scales that fall off by themselves.

ACTS 9:18:
Immediately there FELL FROM HIS EYES SOMETHING LIKE SCALES, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Clean fish must have overlapping scales *that fall off by themselves*. Scales that shed and re-grow remove parasites from fish that might temporarily latch onto them. Tunas and other scrombrid fish have rudimentary (undeveloped) non-overlapping scales imbedded under the surface of their skin. Flatfishes have scales imbedded in their rough skin that can only be removed with a knife and deeply imbedded non-overlapping scales underneath the surface of their skin on their bottom-side smooth bodies.

What does Scripture mean by "and scales?" Did it mean "and ANY scales," or "and scales COVERING THE BODY OF THE FISH?"

scale:
Any of the numerous plates, made of various substances resembling enamel or dentine, COVERING THE BODIES of fishes [2].

The definition of 'scale(s),' in regards to fish, indicates that scaled fish are fish whose bodies are covered with overlapping scales. Rudimentary (undeveloped) scaled tuna (scombrid) fish and half-scaled flatfish should not be considered scaled fish. The words of Scripture "and scales," (Leviticus 11:9-12; Deuteronomy 14:9-10), should be understood to mean "and overlapping scales COVERING THE FISH," not "and ANY scales."

Many will insist that if a fish has any scales it is to be considered a clean kosher fish. Most fish have what are called 'scales' or something that resembles scales. Catfish (some) have scales in childhood, but lose them in adulthood. Catfish (some) have scutes, which are scale-like bony plates covering most of their body that are imbedded deep within their skin. Sharks have placoid scales that are made of bone and are imbedded in their skin. To say that if a fish has *any scales* or *any type of scales*, it is then a clean kosher fish is a simple statement. Catfish and sharks have scale-like structures in their skin and are rightly regarded as unclean fish. A liberal interpretation could view the bony armor plating of catfish and sharks as 'scales,' but these are not the specific, free-falling, overlapping scales that Scripture refers to in regards to clean fish.

The dietary commands were given to the Hebrews at Sinai. They were issued to them in a language and terminology that they understood at the time. Tunas and flatfishes would not be fish that these Hebrews would have considered as clean, scaled fish. These Hebrews would not have inspected fish with magnifying glasses or microscopes, which didn't exist at the time, to check for scales. They would have observed tuna as a fish without visible overlapping scales, or if they spotted the very few visible scales that a tuna possesses, they then would have viewed tuna as a fish that is primarily a scale-less, smooth-bodied skin fish. These Hebrews would have inspected flatfishes and regarded them as unclean, due to their scales not being easily removable on their rough top-side skin and being scale-less on their smooth bottom-side skin.

A bald man usually has some hair on his head. Yet, a man who is primarily bald is not considered a 'man with hair.' Likewise, a rudimentary (undeveloped) scaled tuna fish, or a half-scaled flatfish, should not be considered a 'fish with scales' by description of the Scriptural terminology.

Scales help prevent fish from becoming infested with parasitic worms. Rudimentary scaled tuna fish that are primarily scale-less, smooth-bodied skin fish, or half-scaled flatfishes, are not protected from parasitic infections throughout the flesh of their bodies. Primarily scale-less fish or half-scaled fish are typically infested with parasitic worms throughout their flesh [3].

Clean, fully scaled fish, such as salmon, can also become prone to acquiring parasitic worm infections. However, parasitic infections in clean fish are typically restricted to their exposed areas: their gills. Parasites enter and infect the gill slit areas of clean fish, but do not penetrate their scales infecting their flesh, and generally the parasites do not work their way from the gills into the body and flesh of clean fish. The flesh of clean fish typically remains parasite-free and safe to eat.
In recent times, clean fish have been raised in tight quarters to be harvested for food in commercial fish farms. Clean fish live unhealthier lives in such farms, are more prone to illness and increased parasitic worm infections, and are generally less healthy than wild caught fish. Therefore, it is preferable to purchase wild caught clean fish as the healthier choice, when possible, rather than fish harvested from commercial fish farms.

TUNA FISH
Tunas have a few small visible scales on the sides of their head and have rudimentary (undeveloped) scales imbedded under the surface of their skin throughout their body. Rudimentary scales are extremely small, almost microscopic, non-overlapping scales. Tunas are PRIMARILY a scale-less, smooth-bodied skin fish, which is why they are UNCLEAN. Tunas, as a fish that is primarily a scale-less, smooth-bodied skin fish, are often infested with parasites. Tunas do not have overlapping scales covering the vast majority of their large bodies to shield them from parasitic worms and toxins that can easily penetrate their unprotected skin.

Tunas have varying unsafe levels of mercury content, something they shouldn't have if they were a clean fish and safe for human consumption. Atlantic bluefin tuna (tuna sushi) has the highest levels of mercury of any type of tuna. Several studies have determined that mercury can cause health problems for adults, including an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and neurological disorders. Pregnant women, women who might become pregnant, and children have been advised to not consume tuna as the mercury in tuna can damage the developing nervous system of infants and children [4]. The dangerous mercury content in tuna is a red flag that indicates that there is something not quite kosher about this fish.

UNCLEAN CHARACTERISTICS OF TUNAS (SCOMBRID FISH)
Tunas and other scombrid fish (bonitos, mackerels, wahoos) are unclean because they have rudimentary (undeveloped) scales and are primarily scale-less, smooth-bodied skin fish. The unclean characteristics and features of tunas and other scombrid fish are presented as further evidence to support the viewpoint that tunas and other scrombrid fish are unclean.

ENDOTHERMIC (WARM-BLOODED)
Tunas are endothermic, meaning they are warm-blooded or partially warm-blooded. Tunas can maintain a body temperature higher than that of the surrounding water. Tunas are closely related to other large endothermic, unclean billfish. Endothermic warm bloodedness is a characteristic trait that tunas share with billfish, marlins, sailfish, sharks, spearfish, swordfish, and marine mammals (dolphins, porpoises, seals, whales).

FINLETS
Tunas and other scombrid fish have finlets located on the dorsal and ventral (rear top and bottom) of their body between their dorsal and anal fins and the caudal fin. These finlets are rigid, non-retractable appendages that are somewhat crustacean-like in appearance and texture. Any fish with any kind of non-retractable fins, like sharks and whales have, should be considered unclean.

TOXICITY
Fish without scales have a higher level of toxicity in their flesh than fish with scales. Tuna and mackerel fish have varying high levels of mercury content that can cause long-term health problems for adults, pregnant women, infants and children. Pacific bluefin tunas are top predators and as such they are superb swimmers. They swim across the Pacific Ocean during their life cycles before being caught, packaged, and sold for human consumption. Pacific bluefin tunas have been contaminated with trace amounts of radioactivity acquired from the Japanese Fukushima nuclear reactor accident of March 2011 that continues to leak radiation into the Pacific Ocean to this day [5].

FLATFISH
Flatfish (brill, flounder, fluke, halibut, megrim, plaice, skate, sole, and turbot) are similar looking, bottom dwelling, bottom feeding, half-scaled fish. The scales of flatfish are imbedded in their skin and cannot be easily removed. The top, dark sides of these fish have 'rough' leathery-type scales that can only be removed with a knife. The bottom white side of the fish is typically very smooth and has very few scales, if any, or they are imbedded under their skin and cannot be removed.

All flatfishes are compressed laterally and spend most of their life lying and swimming along the bottom of the waters on their side. Lying on the seafloor makes flatfish susceptible to parasitic infection, but not all worms in the flesh of flatfish originate on the outside, through their un-scaled bottom side. As bottom feeders, flatfish eat parasites that contain worms that often will work their way through the intestines and into the flesh of these fish.

UNCLEAN CHARACTERISTICS OF FLATFISH
Flatfishes share many of the characteristics and features of other unclean creatures. The primary reason flatfish are unclean is because they do not have free-falling, overlapping fish scales covering their bodies, but have imbedded scales that can only be removed with a knife on the top side of their bodies and are smooth-bodied and scale-less on their bottom side. The unclean characteristics and features of flatfish are presented as further evidence to support the viewpoint that flatfish are unclean.

AMBUSH PREDATORS
Flatfish are ambush, lie-and-wait predators. They position themselves on the sea floor, often camouflaged, then lie, wait, and ambush their prey as they crawl or swim by. All ambush, lie-and-wait predator birds, insects, and mammals are unclean. Flatfish are ambush, lie-and-wait, predator fish that are unclean.

CAMOUFLAGE
Flatfish have the ability to camouflage their skin color to match their surroundings. Camouflage is a trait that flatfish share with unclean chameleons, cuttlefish, and octopuses.

HORIZONTAL SWIMMERS (NOT VERTICAL)
Flatfish swim in a horizontal plane, rather than in a vertical, back-up/belly-down, orientation as most other fish do. When they swim, flatfish tend to glide about an inch (2.54 cm) above the contour of the sea floor. Flatfish swim horizontally, as do unclean manta ray sharks.

SAND DWELLERS
Flatfish relax and cover themselves in sand on the sea floor to camouflage and lie in wait as ambush predators. Flatfish that 'wallow in the sand' share a similar characteristic of the unclean female swine that 'wallow in the mire.'

2 PETER 2:22:
"A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

SCAVENGERS
Flatfish are bottom feeders and scavengers. They eat the dead carcass remains of fish and other sea creatures that fall to or die on the sea floor. All carrion-eating scavenger birds, insects, and mammals are unclean.

STEREOSCOPIC VISION
Flatfishes have two eyes on the same side of their head that are capable of independently rotating almost 360 degrees, giving these fish depth perception and an excellent field of vision. This enables them, as a predatory fish, to more easily spot and capture prey. Most other fish have eyes located on opposite sides of their head, each eye generating an independent image.

Whenever flatfish are being sold in a fish market, they are always presented belly up with their eyed-side down, because instinctively people are somewhat repulsed and will not purchase fish that have two-stereoscopic predatory eyes on the same side of their body.

All clean birds, insects, and mammals have eyes on the opposite sides of their heads. Unclean predator birds, insects, and mammals have stereoscopic binocular vision, or independently rotating eyes, enabling them to more easily spot and capture prey. Independently rotating eyes, eyes that enable flatfish to see in more than one direction at the same time, is a feature that flatfish share with unclean chameleons.

SWIMMERS (SOLITARY) THAT DO NOT GROUP IN SHOALS OR SWIM IN SCHOOLS
Flatfishes are independent solitary swimmers that do not group together and swim in schools [6]. All clean birds group together in flocks when foraging or in flight, all clean insects group together in colonies and can swarm, and all clean mammals group together in herds and can stampede. Clean fish group together in shoals and swim in schools.

YESHUA (JESUS) COMMANDS SCHOOLS OF FISH INTO NETS

LUKE 5:4-6:
When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.

Bottom dwelling flatfish are not caught in fishnets, but with hooks or spears. Flatfish were not the kind of fish that Peter the fisherman, a man who never ate anything unclean, caught in his nets (Acts 10:14).

OTHER UNCLEAN OR QUESTIONABLE FISH
Groupers and orange roughy (slimehead) are bottom-dwelling, bottom-feeding fish. Groupers have non-overlapping, snake-like, diamond-patterned imbedded scales that are not easily removable. Groupers are ambush predators and solitary swimmers that do not swim in schools. Groupers are typically infested with numerous parasites, including cestodes, copepods, digeneans, isopods, monogeneans, and nematodes [7]. Grouper and orange roughy fish have high levels of mercury and should not be consumed for these reasons. Codfish have smooth, non-overlapping, scarcely visible, oily scales and a well-developed chin barbell on their lower jaw. Barbells are a characteristic feature of unclean catfish. The Atlantic cod can change color between gray-green and reddish brown. Color changing and camouflage ability are traits of unclean creatures. Haddock fish have scales that are scarcely visible through the mucus with which their skin is coated. Codfish and haddock are bottom-feeders plagued with parasitic cod worm infestations throughout their flesh. Similar related bottom-feeding, reef-dwelling fish are bass, pollack, snapper, and whiting.

Though rare, there have been reported cases of ciguatera poisoning in humans after consuming groupers, snappers, and other large predatory reef species. Ciguatera poison is accumulated in large bottom-feeding, reef-dwelling fish through their diet of feeding on small herbivorous fish, which feed on dinoflagellates (microalgae), which is the source of the poison. Symptoms reported in poisoned people include gastrointestinal problems for up to several days and a general weakness in their arms and legs [8].

All fish that have non-shedding, non-overlapping, diamond-patterned, or imbedded scales should be considered unclean.

CLEAN FISH
Bass, bluefish, herring, mahi mahi, mullet, salmon, snapper, and trout are among the healthiest and safest fish to eat, which are offered on many American menus. When selecting fish from a fish market, make sure they have visible, easily removable, overlapping scales.

Many believers may think that they are keeping kosher by avoiding pork and shellfish, while not realizing that many fish meals sold in fast food restaurants are some kind of unclean flatfish (in fish and chips) or tuna. Kosher-conscious believers need to put flatfish and tuna on their list of unclean creatures not to be eaten. Caution should be taken when buying fish from a fish market and inquiries made about fish type when ordering fish in restaurants.

Jewish rabbinical authority is NOT the final authority on determining clean and unclean fish. Rabbinical authorities rejected Messiah. They should not be considered infallible on the topic of kosher certification or determining clean and unclean creatures.

Rabbinical kosher-certifying authorities err in classifying tunas and flatfish as scaled clean fish in these two ways:

1. They classify tunas and other rudimentary-scaled, smooth-skinned scombrid fish as clean and kosher. Rudimentary (undeveloped) scales are tiny, non-overlapping scales of scrombrid fish.

2. They classify flatfishes that are scaled on their topside and scale-less on their bottom side as clean and kosher. Flatfish have scales imbedded on their topside rough skin that are only removable with a knife.

The following recommended guidelines should be adhered to when selecting scientifically and Scripturally clean healthy fish:

CLEAN FISH HAVE FINS AND OVERLAPPING SCALES THAT ARE VISIBLE TO THE HUMAN EYE, OVERLAPPING SCALES THAT COVER THE ENTIRE BODY OF THE FISH, AND OVERLAPPING SCALES THAT FALL OFF EASILY BY THEMSELVES.*
*(WITHOUT THE USE OF A KNIFE).

1. 'Scales,' International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Bible Hub,
< http://biblehub.com/topical/s/scales.htm >.

2. 'Scale,' Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, HarperCollins Publishers 2016,
< http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/scale >.

3. Clinton, Cliff, "Parasitic Worm in Sushi," YouTube video,
< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE-jpYCh2Og >.
* Tuna sushi (the red piece) with parasitic worm. The salmon sushi, a clean fish (the orange piece), has no worms. Parasitic worms are likewise found in unclean swine (pork).

4. Burros, Marian, "High Mercury Levels Are Found in Tuna Sushi," The New York Times, Jan. 23, 2008,
< http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/23/dining/23sushi.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 >.

5. Melnick, Merideth, "Bluefin Tuna Radiation: Is There A Health Risk?" HUFFPOST May 29, 2012,
< http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/29/bluefin-tuna-radioactive-radiation-health_n_1552838.html >.

6. Lopez, Joseph "Flounder," YouTube video, July 29, 2012,
< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW7b6FK4P4c >.
The video depicts a flatfish (flounder) swimming. They swim horizontally not vertically, alone - not in schools, and can camouflage themselves rapidly like the unclean octopus, cuttlefish, and chameleon. They feed as a predatory fish by lying in wait for prey on the sea floor and also as scavengers that eat fish carcasses and other remains of sea creatures that they come across on the sea floor.

7. 'Grouper,' Wikipedia, < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grouper >.

8. "Nassau Grouper Epinephelus striatus," Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida,
< http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/discover/species-profiles/epinephelus-striatus/# >.