

Shemini: Why can't we eat a "cheeseburger in Paradise?"

Vayikra 11:2-3

דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֹאת הִחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

Speak to the Israelite people thus:

These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals:

כָּל־אֲנִימָה אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ מַעְלָת פְּרָסוֹת וְשִׁסְעוֹת וְשִׁסְעוֹת פְּרָסוֹת מֵעַלְת גֵּרָה בְּבֵהֶמָה אֲתָה תֹאכְלוּ:

any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud—such you may eat.

Rashi

זֹאת הִחַיָּה THESE ARE THE ANIMALS — the word *חיה* is an expression denoting life and is purposely used here in preference to *בהמה* to express the following idea: because Israel cleave to the Omnipresent and therefore deserve to remain in life, [*זאת החיה is thus taken to mean: This, O living nation (or, nation that lives), is what ye may eat!*]. He therefore separated them from what is unclean, and imposed commandments upon them, whilst to the other nations who do not cleave to him He prohibited nought. A parable! It may be compared to the case of a physician who goes to visit a sick person: one who is incurable he permits to eat whatever he chooses, while to the patient who may recover he gives directions as to what he may eat and may not eat — as may be found in the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma 3:3:6.

Rabbeinu Bahya (continues with the parable above. Is it different?)

The families of both patients became aware that the doctor had prescribed only for the one patient and they wanted to know why. The doctor explained that the patient who died had been doomed already. There was therefore no point in denying him what he could enjoy on a short-term basis. The same applies to the Israelites and the seven Gentile nations who are doomed. Seeing that the latter are headed for death anyway, there is not much point in prescribing a restrictive diet. The Israelites, however, may be saved from their sickness if they keep a strict diet. Hence the Torah issued the instructions in this chapter, while allowing the Gentiles to eat whatever they want. This is the mystical dimension of introducing this chapter with the words *זאת החיה*, *this is the life-giving legislation regarding food which may be consumed, etc.* "Seeing that the Israelites are attached to eternal life, it is important that they not consume food which could endanger their hereafter."

Hatam Sofer

These are the beasts which you will eat... The Torah begins with those animals which may be eaten, as opposed to those animals which are forbidden. Similarly, with fish and locusts, the

permitted species are listed first. The reason is because, by logic, one should not be permitted to eat any living creature. The Torah thus had to begin with those species which are permitted, because the fact that one may eat any creature is something which we would not have known otherwise.

11:7

וְאֶת־הַחֲזִיר כִּי־מַפְרִיס פְּרָסָה הוּא וְשֹׁטֵעַ שֹׁסֵעַ פְּרָסָה וְהוּא גְרָה לֹא־יִגַּר טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם:

and the swine—although it has true hoofs, with the hoofs cleft through, it does not chew the cud: it is impure for you.

Rashbam

ושטעה שסע, the hoof being completely split into two parts, unlike the hoof of a horse or donkey which is all in one piece. According to the plain meaning of the text and the opinion of the heretics all the domesticated beasts, free roaming beasts, birds and fish and certain types of locusts and other creeping creatures that G'd has outlawed for consumption by Jews is due to the fact that they cause excessive heat in our bodies when eaten, affecting our health detrimentally, and therefore they are called טמאים, impure. There is support for this theory also among physicians. Even in the Talmud (Shabbat 86) the opinion is offered that gentiles who do consume these creeping creatures damage their bodies thereby.

Iturei Torah - Torah Gems

And the swine... None is poorer than a dog and none is richer than a swine (Shabbat 155b). Even though eating swine is only prohibited by a single Torah prohibition, people are scrupulous in observing this law. No law “is richer” in application. Yet, when it comes to slandering others, which is symbolized by a dog (our Sages tell us: “One who slanders others deserves to be thrown to the dogs” - Pesachim 118), and here there are numerous prohibitions, “there is none poorer,” and people often violate the laws without thinking twice.

11:9

אֵת־זֶה תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ סַנְפִּיר וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׁת בַּמַּיִם בַּמַּיִם וּבַנְּחָלִים אֵתֶם תֹאכְלוּ:

These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales—these you may eat.

Tze'edah Ure'renah

“*Fins and scales*” [11:9]. Those fish that have scales and fins are permitted to be eaten. They can swim well in the upper parts of the water because they have scales. However, those that have no scales must lie on the bottom in the mud of the water. They are not healthy. Whoever eats them becomes cold from them and his heart becomes stopped up.

Nachmanides

“Their carcass shall ye detest”. The distinguishing mark of a forbidden bird is its carnivorousness. Every bird of prey is invariably unclean for fear that its bloodthirstiness would be communicated to the partaker of its meat through the blood. This may well be the reason for the prohibition of certain animals, since there is no cloven footed cud-chewing animal which preys on others.

Rambam

I maintain that the food which is forbidden by the Torah is unwholesome. There is nothing among the forbidden kinds of food whose harmful character is doubted, except pork and fat. But in these cases too the doubt is not justified. For pork contains more moisture than is necessary and too much of superfluous matter. The principle reason why the Torah forbids swine’s flesh is to be found in the circumstance that its habits and its food are very dirty and loathsome. It has already been pointed out how emphatically the Torah enjoins the removal of the sight of loathsome objects, even in the field and the camp, how much more objectionable is such a sight in towns! But if it were allowed to eat swine’s flesh, the streets and houses would be filthier than any cesspool as may be seen at present in the country of the Franks. A saying of our Sages declared: “The mouth of a swine is as filthy as dung itself”...the best meat is that of animals permitted to be used as food. No doctor has any doubts about this...

The characteristics given in the Torah of the permitted animals, viz., chewing the cud and divided hoofs for cattle and fins and scales for fish are in themselves neither the cause of the permission when they are present nor of the prohibition when they are absent; but merely signs by which the permitted species of animals can be discerned from those that are forbidden.

Sefer Ha-chinuch

Here are the roots of this precept (no. 73 “You shall not eat..) The body is the tool of the soul through which it accomplishes its function and without which it could never complete its task. The soul has indeed naturally sought the shelter of the body to do itself good and not harm; for God means no harm but only good to all. The body’s relations to the soul can therefore be compared with the tongs to the hands of the smith which he manufactured his implements. Where the tongs are strong and well-made the craftsman will be able to produce good quality work but where the tongs are faulty, the implements will never turn out well. It is the same when the body suffers some disability. It will have a correspondingly detrimental effect on the intelligence. For this reason our perfect Torah separated us from harmful factors. This is the common sense reason for the Torah’s dietary prohibitions. If the harmful character of some of these forbidden foods is unknown to us or to medical science, do not be puzzled since the True Physician who admonished us regarding them is wiser than us or them.

You should know that the cause and effect of these prohibitions were not divulged - for our benefit, lest people with scientific pretensions should argue: The deleterious effects attributed by the Torah to this food is only applicable in certain climates and with certain types of people.

Akedat Yitzchak

We would do well to bear in mind that the dietary laws are not as some have asserted motivated by therapeutic considerations. God forbid! Were that so, the Torah would be denigrated to the status of a minor medical treatise and worse than that, Apart from the alleged ill-effects could be treated with various drugs, just as there are antidotes to the most powerful poisons,. In that even the prohibitions would no longer apply and the Torah would be superfluous.

Abravanel

All this comes to teach us that the Divine law did not come to take the place of a medical handbook but to protect our spiritual health. It therefore forbade foods which revolt the pure and intellectual soul, clogging the human temperament, demoralising the character, promoting an unclean spirit, defiling in thought and deed, driving out the pure and holy spirit about which David exclaimed "The body spirit take not from me" "A pure heart God created for me" For this reason the Almighty used the phrase "Do not revolt your souls with all the vermin..." rather than terming them poisonous or harmful. They were rather unclean and abominating, indicating the spiritual rather than physical source of their prohibition.

Kosher (Springsteen) Parody by Jeff Klepper

You got to have a cloven hoof, you got to chew your cud
The bunny rabbit is a no no, and so are piggies in the mud
You cannot be a bird of prey cause that is what the Rabbis say
So when we eat meat it's kosher

You fishies need a coat of scales, you got to have a set of fins
And if you are a crustacean, then brother you just don't fit in
The word kasher means "fit" for you to gobble every bit
So eat that fish dish it's kosher!

You might like the smell of bacon frying in the pan,
Or want to sink your teeth into a juicy clam
I bought a weiner at the park, I thought it might be safe,
But I heard a voice say: "That hot dog's trayf!"

I'm looking for the letter "K" or else a "U" inside an "O"
And if I cannot find it, then right back on the shelf you go
I'll bet that it's a lot of fun to be a vegetarian
So when we nosh squash it's kosher
So when we nosh a McIntosh it's kosher.

