

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Pesl bas Mendel Volf.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHEMINI

Heaven on Earth

And it was on the eighth day... (9:1)

This week's *parsha* begins with Aharon and his sons' eighth day of the inauguration into the priesthood of serving in the Mishkan (see Rashi ad loc). The Talmud (*Megillah* 10b) makes a very interesting comment on this *possuk*; "it was taught in a *Baraisa* – [on this eighth day] Hashem rejoiced as when he created the heavens and earth." What does the inauguration of the Mishkan have to do with the creation of the world?

Furthermore, we also find a cryptic reference to joy regarding the eighth day of inauguration of the Mishkan in Rashi in *Shir Hashirim*. The verse states, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of the gladness of his heart" (3:11). Rashi (ad loc) explains the crown of the wedding day refers to the day that Bnei Yisroel accepted upon them the yoke of Torah – the day they received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and "the day of the gladness of his heart refers to the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan."

So once again, we find that there is immense joy on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan (we are also compelled to point out that according to this Chazal a person's wedding day isn't necessarily the happiest day of one's life – sorry ladies). So what is the source of this unbridled joy attached to the final day of the inauguration of the Mishkan?

Hashem created the world to provide a

vehicle for man to achieve the ultimate in goodness – a relationship with Hashem. The joy that was experienced in the creation of the world was the exciting anticipation of creating a home for man to exist in where he could earn all the good Hashem wanted to bestow.

The ultimate fulfillment of this vision was when Bnei Yisroel built a Mishkan, a home for Hashem, and invited Him to dwell in their midst in order to achieve the ultimate in good that Hashem could bestow in this world: A close personal relationship with Hashem. Building the Mishkan was in fact quite similar to the creation of the world; Chazal teach us that the reason Betzalel was chosen as the architect was because he alone knew how to combine all the letters that were used in creation and he utilized that knowledge to create the Mishkan.

R' Chaim Volozhin says, in the first chapter of his epic work *Nefesh Hachaim*, that the Mishkan is a miniature model of the universe, as is the human body. In other words, Bnei Yisroel modeled Hashem's behavior: Hashem created his world and invited man to live in it, and man created a similar world and invited Hashem to dwell with them. This parallel act was why the joy of creating the world was the same joy experienced at the inauguration of the Mishkan. The creation of the Mishkan was the ultimate fulfillment of Hashem's plan of giving man the opportunity to have a relationship with his creator.



Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* we have a very detailed account of what the Jewish people are permitted to eat. The only permitted animals are those that have split hooves and chew their cud. Chazal state that since the Torah's list of animals that have a single indicator (either split hooves or chew their cud) is very detailed, Chazal created other indicators so we could easily identify kosher animals (*Chullin* 59a; *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1).

They concluded that any animal that chews its cud is kosher if it is not one of the three exceptions stated in the Torah. They also stated that all animals that do not have upper incisors, canines, or soft front tooth-like structures and chew their cud are kosher, with the one exception of the young camel.

In other words, the adult camel and the other two examples, while chew their cud, still possess these "teeth" that are not found in kosher animals. This dental indicator is considered enough to understand that an animal is kosher. So, if one were to come across an unknown animal that was not a young camel and found it to have no upper incisors, he may eat it. →

To Eat or Not to Eat

To distinguish between the impure and the pure, and between the animals that can be eaten and those animals which you should not eat (11:47).

At the end of this week's *parsha* we have forty seven verses devoted to the identification of the various kosher and non-kosher animals, fish, birds, and insects. The very last verse in the *parsha* contains a fascinating structural anomaly.

Kosher animals are referred to as animals that may be eaten (vegans take heart – there isn't a command to eat them), while non-kosher animals are identified as those that you may not eat. The Torah is clearly distinguishing a difference between kosher animals and non-kosher animals. Kosher animals are designated as edible, while non-kosher animals are not designated as inedible; rather they are merely designated as prohibited on the individual to consume. While this may seem to be a slight variation, it is in fact a monumental distinction.

Maimonides in his famous introduction to *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers), the philosophical work known as *Shemoneh Prakim*, discusses a fascinating question regarding moral achievement. Rambam wonders: What is a higher level of achievement; is it better for one to not want to sin or is it better for one to desire to sin but control his desires?

Maimonides answers that it depends on the type of sin one desires to do. He divides sins into two categories. The first is those that “are commonly agreed upon evils such as murder, theft, ingratitude, contempt for one’s parents, and the like. These are sins that the rabbis have said ‘even if they hadn't been written into law it would be proper to add them.’” The second category is of sins that if the Torah hadn't forbidden them they would not be considered transgressions at all. This includes: laws of *kashrut*, prohibition of wool and linen clothes, consanguineous marriages, and such (*Shemoneh Prakim*, Chapter 6).

According to Maimonides, regarding the first category of “rational sins,” it is better not to want to do the sin. As he terms it; “a soul that desires these sins has a defect.” The second category contains sins that are only forbidden because the Torah prohibits them, not because they are morally wrong. Regarding these sins it is better to say, “I desire them but what am I to do, Hashem has forbidden them.”

Maimonides' remarkable distinction may also have very practical applications to those who either grew up without knowledge of the Torah commandments or those who accepted the yoke of Torah later in life, such as converts. How are they to view the indiscretions of their past? Are they permitted to look fondly on their earlier lives when they enjoyed eating lobster and cheese burgers? Perhaps the answer is yes, and they get even more reward knowing that in their current lives they freely choose to adhere to those laws because Hashem has forbidden them.

This is why the Torah describes the non-kosher animals in this week's *parsha* as those that one is commanded not to eat, rather than calling them inedible.

There are many who try to explain the laws of *kashrut* as rational outcomes for better health: eating pork could cause trichinosis, mixing milk and meat has deleterious effects on the body, eating properly slaughtered meat has less toxins and hormones than animals that are slaughtered in a non-kosher way, shrimp and lobster have exceedingly high cholesterol levels, etc. – therefore kosher is a healthier way to live. While some of these claims are valid, the overall theory is faulty. The reason we don't eat these forbidden animals isn't because they are “inedible,” we don't eat them simply because Hashem has forbidden them to be eaten.

Did You Know Continued

The Chachamim further stated that every animal that has completely split hooves also chews its cud and is therefore kosher, with the singular notable biblical exception – the pig (*Sefer HaEshkol; Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1). Therefore, any unknown species that has split hooves and is not a pig is kosher.

Interestingly, Chazal added an additional identifying feature of kosher animals that seemingly has no basis in the written Torah and is based solely on an oral tradition received by Moshe at Mount Sinai: Other than the wild donkey (in Hebrew – *arod*), no non-kosher animal has meat under the tail with grain that runs both ways. Therefore, if one slaughters an unknown animal and finds that the grain of its meat runs both ways, and knows that it is not a wild donkey, then the meat is kosher.

Additionally, the Mishna (*Niddah* 51b), at least according to Rashi's understanding, states that horns alone are enough to declare an animal kosher, since all horned animals are kosher.

Finally, it's important to note that scientists have classified many thousands of animals since the Torah was given to Bnei Yisroel 3,300 years ago, and in that time many thousands of new animals have been discovered. However, not one of the new animals has ever qualified as an added exception to those specifically written in the Torah. In other words, pigs are still the only animals with split hooves that don't chew their cud, and camels, *shafans*, and *arneveses* (the other two animals the Torah mentions), are still the only cud-chewing animals without split hooves!



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