

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Devorah bas Yisroel Dovid. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHEMINI

You Are How You Eat

For I am Hashem that lifted you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God [...] (11:45).

The last forty seven verses in this week's *parsha* describe with intricate detail the laws of *kashrus* as it relates to the different animals, birds, and fish that may be eaten. The Torah also specifically prohibits certain animals and birds from being consumed. Additionally, the Torah excludes from consumption an entire group of animals that are disgusting to eat because they creep on the ground and consuming them would be "abominable" (11:43).

The Torah then gives the reason for all these laws of *kashrus*: "For I am Hashem that lifted you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God [...]" (11:45). Rashi on this *posuk* quotes the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 61b), which explains why the Torah uses such unusual language here.

Rav Chanina asked Ravina, why is it that everywhere in the Torah it says, "I am Hashem that took you out of Egypt" but here it says, "For I am Hashem that lifted you out of the land of Egypt"? The Gemara answers that not eating these lowly animals elevates a person, thus the Torah uses the language that Hashem "lifted" the Jewish people out of Egypt because this very commitment elevates us.

In fact, this concept, that keeping the laws of *kashrus* raises us up, really applies to all the *mitzvos*. In other words, Hashem took us out of Egypt to give us the Torah and we should keep His *mitzvos* so that we can grow and be elevated. But why is this statement made specifically by the laws of *kashrus*?

The Talmud (*Yoma* 75b) relates a fascinating (and for some reason little known) fact: "Rav Acha Bar Yaakov said, 'In the beginning the Jewish people were like chickens pecking at the garbage continuously until Moshe Rabbeinu came along and established meal times for them.'"

This is quite remarkable on many levels; first of all what is this comparison to chickens eating garbage? Secondly, why is this so important that Moshe felt that he had to come along and change how people eat?

Maimonides, in his introduction to *Pirkei Avos*, discusses the issue of whether it is better to want to sin but refrain because Hashem commanded us not to, or rather to not even desire to sin to begin with. He concludes that there are two types of sins, those that are moral/ethical issues (e.g. stealing) and those that we don't really understand (e.g. *kashrus*). He continues, those that are moral issues we shouldn't even desire to sin by and those that are unknowable decrees from Hashem we should desire to transgress but exert an effort to control ourselves.

Controlling one's food intake is one of the hardest ongoing challenges in many people's lives. The drive to just consume whatever they desire stems from many parts of one's psyche; a person may desire as much pleasure as possible or a person may binge to drown out emotional distress or other issues. One of the hardest parts of being on a diet is that one has to eat to live; it isn't like smoking



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or a drug addiction where the vice can be entirely eliminated.

Thus, every time we decide what and how much to eat we need to exercise restraint and self-control. This effort is what highlights the difference between man and the animal kingdom. Man becoming restrained and in control of his desires is what truly elevates mankind and puts him in touch with his elevated soul. It is no coincidence that the original sin of Adam Harishon came through eating and permanently lowered mankind into physical beings by introducing death to the world (see next article).

This is why Bnei Yisroel were compared to chickens eating garbage – a lower animal doesn't really care if it resorts to eating refuse, but people understand that it is beneath one's dignity as humans to behave that way. This is why it was so important that Moshe felt it necessary to teach the Jewish people how to eat; it was a lesson that we are elevated beings not merely rational animals and therefore we need to always be in control. This is also why the laws of *kashrus* highlight the entirety of the Torah's intent – to grow as humans and elevate ourselves to be God-like by exerting self-restraint.

Moshe's Ark

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: Speak to Bnei Yisroel and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow [...] (19:1-2).

This week we read one of the four "special" parshios – Parshas Parah – the description of the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah. The ashes of the Parah Adumah, an extremely rare perfectly red cow, would be used in the process of purifying those who had come into contact with the dead. This is read specifically at this time of year because everyone needed to be purified in order to partake in the Pascal Lamb.

In this *posuk*, Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the term "to you," which is in the singular even though Hashem was addressing both Moshe and Aharon. He goes on to explain that the Parah Adumah was a mitzvah that would always be referred to as the cow that Moshe prepared in the desert. In other words, this mitzvah is permanently associated with Moshe Rabbeinu.

What exactly does this mean? While it is true that Moshe organized the procedure of the one that was done in the desert, why would a Parah Adumah done a thousand years later still be referred to as Moshe's? How did Moshe come to acquire the naming rights to the Parah Adumah and why this mitzvah more than any other?

Rashi, in his addendum to the end of the section describing the Parah Adumah, describes ten similarities between the processing of the Parah Adumah and the sin of the golden calf. In other words, the Parah Adumah is meant as an atonement for the sin of the golden calf. How does this dovetail with the main purpose of the Parah Adumah, that of purifying those that have come into contact with a dead person?

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 146a) informs us that death left the world when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai to Bnei Yisroel. Death was introduced into the world when Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In other words, Bnei Yisroel accepting the Torah was a rectification of Adam's sin and therefore death left the world. The Gemara continues; when Bnei Yisroel sinned by the golden calf death returned. In fact, Hashem had proclaimed a death sentence on the entire Jewish people.

Moshe was the only one not included in the death sentence of the golden calf. Actually, Hashem made an offer to Moshe that he would rebuild the Jewish

people solely from Moshe, which he refused. Instead, Moshe pleaded on behalf of Bnei Yisroel that Hashem should spare them. Hashem relented and, in fact, taught Moshe the process of achieving forgiveness by reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that we have incorporated into the Yom Kippur *davening*.

The Parah Adumah, whose actual purpose is to remove the defilement that comes from being in contact with a dead person, is therefore an atonement on the sin of the golden calf, which was the cause of death returning to the world. This explains why Moshe is forevermore credited with the mitzvah of Parah Adumah; it was he who pleaded with Hashem not to destroy Bnei Yisroel after the sin of the golden calf. The Parah Adumah, in effect, serves the exact function that Moshe accomplished when he prevailed upon Hashem to spare Bnei Yisroel. Having Moshe's name attached to the mitzvah is the very definition of the purpose of the Parah Adumah.

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