

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Binyamin Avraham ben Shlomo. "May his 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.



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# To Eat or Not to Eat

**To distinguish between the impure and the pure, and between the animals that are edible and those animals which are not to be eaten (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 are edible and may be eaten (vegans take heart – there isn't a command to eat them), while non-kosher animals are identified as those that are not to be eaten. 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 designated as prohibited for 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 the Torah tells us are not to be eaten, 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.



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