

# Parsha Ponders

Shemini | April 16, 2020 | 23 Nissan 5780

## *Respect for the past, acclimating to the future*<sup>1</sup>

דברו אל-בני ישראל לאמר זאת החיה אשר תאכלו מכל-הבהמה אשר על-הארץ: כל מפרסת פרסת ושעת שסע פרסת מעלת גרה בבהמה אתה תאכלו: אך את-זה לא תאכלו ממעלי הגרה וממפריסי הפרסה את-הגמל כי-מעלה גרה הוא ופרסה איננו מפריס וגו' ואת-החזיר כי-מפריס פרסה הוא ושסע פרסה והוא גרה לא-יגר טמא הוא לכם

Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: “These are the animals that you shall eat, from all the animals on the Earth: Any animal with completely split hooves, which chews its cud, you shall eat. However, these you shall not eat from those that chew their cud and have split hooves: The camel, although it chews its cud, its hooves aren’t [completely] split...And the pig, although its hooves are completely split, it doesn’t chew its cud. It is impure to you”<sup>2</sup>

The basic laws of kosher animals are introduced in this *parsha*. The rules are simple: animals with the Torah’s two kosher signs are permissible to eat. They need to have their hooves be completely split and chew their cud. If the animal has only one of these signs, like a camel or a pig, and for sure if it has neither of these signs, like a horse or a lion, then it is not kosher. However, sheep, lambs, cows, and deer, have both signs. These are permissible animals to eat.

While there are different suggestions offered for the purpose behind the laws of *kashrus*, at the end of the day, they can more readily be categorized as a *chok*, a decree from Hashem<sup>3</sup>. We can’t know the exact reason behind them, as their true purpose alludes human comprehension. Still, the various attempts to explain these laws seem to understand *kashrus* as the fulfillment of the expression “you are what you eat”<sup>4</sup>. They understand that for whatever reason, Hashem didn’t want the Jews consuming non-kosher animals, as their consumption will have a negative impact on the Jew. Whether this is a physical<sup>5</sup>, psychological<sup>6</sup>, or spiritual<sup>7</sup> impact is up for debate. The following is but one suggestion.

<sup>1</sup> Heard from [Rabbi Dovid Rosen](#) from the COR. He admitted at the time that he couldn’t recall where he saw this idea. After searching, it may have been his source was [Rav Yoel Schwartz](#) of Israel, born in 1939. He’s written around two hundred publications, and he wrote about this idea many times. It appears in his [Yemos Olam](#) (1980) Chapter 1, [Toldos HaAdam](#) (1980) *Mevo* p. 25, [Sidras HaMiddos](#) (1993) *HaChiddush VeHaHischadshus* Chapter 1, and [Eidan HaMachshev ULakchav](#) (2005) *Mevo* p. 9. In [Toldos HaAdam](#) he writes that he heard this idea in the name of a Yerushalmi sage. I also found this idea written unsourced in [Neimos Netzach](#) II p. 55, by [Rav Yaakov Shachnazi](#) of Israel, born 1953. The latter was published in 1995, so I’m not sure if he got it from [Rav Schwartz](#), or if he came up with it on his own

<sup>2</sup> [Leviticus](#) 11:2-4, 7

<sup>3</sup> See [Toras Kohanim](#) 4:9 and [Shemoneh Perakim](#) Chapter 6

<sup>4</sup> [Sefer HaChinuch](#) § 147: וידוע הדבר ומפרסם בין בני אדם כי לפי המאכלים יתפעל הגוף בבריאות או בחולי

<sup>5</sup> [Ramban](#) to [Deuteronomy](#) 14:3: ככל מה שאסרתו התורה עלינו מן המאכלים, מזונם מגונה...וכן הדם והנבלה קשים להתעכל ומזונם רע: [Moreh Nevuchim](#) 3:48; [Sefer HaChinuch](#) § 73: הרחיקתנו תרתנו השלמה; [Sefer HaChinuch](#) § 73: ואתה...שבת לנו האיסור בתורה בכל מאכלות האסורים. ואם יש מהם שאין נודע לנו ולא לחכמי הרפואה נזק, אל תתמה עליהן

<sup>6</sup> Meaning, personality or character traits, as will be discussed below. The concept of *timtum halev* is generally understood to mean an affect on character traits. In which case, the [Ramban loc. cit.](#) writes באיטיות בנפש...ואיטיות האסורים; [Abarbanel](#) to [Leviticus](#) 11:13: שלא באה התורה...אלא לבקש בריאות הנפש...לפי שהיו מתעבים ומשקצים את הנפש הטהורה המשכלת ומולידות במזג האנושי איטיות. See also [Rashba](#) to [Yevamos](#) 114a s.v. brought by the [Ran Avodah Zarah](#) 7b, and codified by the [Rema Yoreh Deah](#) 81:7, that non-kosher food produces bad character traits, to the point that it could enter a woman’s milk. If this milk would be ingested by a baby, this food subsequently give them bad character traits. Cf. [Biur HaGra ad. loc.](#) § 31 *Likkut*, quoting [Ran loc. cit.](#) See also [Pri Chadash ad. loc.](#) § 26 just how bad non-kosher food can affect a child, and the [Shach ad. loc.](#) § 26, that even Rabbinically forbidden foods can cause *timtum halev*

<sup>7</sup> [Ramban](#) to [Exodus](#) 22:30: לא תגאלו...לא תאכלו בנפש, שתאכל דברים נקיים שלא יולידו עובי וגסות בנפש...לא תגאלו...לא תאכלו בנפש. Unless the [Ramban](#) to [Deuteronomy](#) *loc. cit.*: נפשותיכם באכילת הדברים המתועבים

The two kosher signs, chewing the cud, and completely split hooves, do they have a deeper symbolism? Chewing the cud shows an appreciation for the past. The animal benefits and enjoys that which it already consumed. Split hooves, on the other hand, show a focus on the future. The animal goes somewhere, and it sticks out its feet towards its destination. Camels, which chew their cud, but don't have completely split hooves, would then represent a respect for the past. Pigs, which don't chew their cud, but have completely split hooves, would represent a progressive outlook.

It's interesting if we examine the diet of different societies<sup>8</sup>. Arabic countries have a deeply rooted tradition. They have a high respect for their elders, and an appreciation for religion and custom. They have a hard time adjusting to new ways of thinking or new societal advances. They resist change. Noteworthy is that a commonly consumed dish in Arabic countries is camel meat<sup>9</sup>. For them, pig is *haram*, forbidden for consumption. That means a large part of their diet consists of an animal with one kosher sign, the one representing an appreciation for the past. Yet, their diet isn't largely based on something that represents forward thinking.

Western society, on the other hand, has less interest in the past, and is very progressive thinking. The next generation is always considered better and more advanced than the previous. New is always better, and tradition for tradition's sake isn't encouraged. As well, by and large, Western society consumes pork products. At the same time, camel meat is considered abhorrent. It's also impractical for consumption. That means a large part of their diet also consists of an animal with one kosher sign, the one representing a focus on the future. Yet, their diet doesn't emphasize something which represents an admiration for the past.

Jews, by contrast, can only eat animals with both kosher signs. Their meat diet mainly consists of bovine, which both chew their cud and have completely split hooves. As well, Judaism places a tremendous focus on the past. We look to the older generation for guidance, and the Torah commands respect for elders. We have deeply rooted traditions and follow laws that were given thousands of years ago. At the same time, we are adaptable to the changes which come with time. We have learned to function in society, while at the same time keeping our values. We have both elements which are represented by the two kosher signs.

This isn't irrefutable proof for anything, and could merely be demonstrating correlation and not causation. Nevertheless, many Jewish thinkers over the centuries understood and believed very strongly that "you are what you eat". Perhaps we see clear examples of this before our very eyes.

Good Shabbos

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when he says נפש he means the physical soul not the spiritual one; Rabbeinu Bachaye to Leviticus 11:43: שהלב מטמא באכילת הדברים האסורים ואין רוח הקודש שורה בו

<sup>8</sup> The sources in note 1 only focused on the **symbolism** behind each of the nations. Arab society, understood to be the nation of Yishmael, is symbolized by a camel (Yalkut Reuveni). Western society is represented by Eisav, who is symbolized by a pig (Psalms 80:14, Bereishis Rabbah 65:1). Jews, on the other hand, are symbolized by a sheep (Jeremiah 50:17), which has both kosher symbols. Only Yemos Olam and Toldos HaAdam *loc. cit.* focused on the actual consumption of these animals, which fits nicely with how the *Rishonim* understood *kashrus*

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camel#cite\\_note-yagil-camelother-122](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camel#cite_note-yagil-camelother-122)