

Parsha Ponders

Shemini | April 8, 2021 | 27 Nissan 5781

To be satisfied with one's lot¹

כל מפרסת פרסה ושסעת שסע פרסת מעלת גרה בבהמה אתה תאכלו

All domesticated animals which have completely split hooves, and that chew their cud, those you shall eat²

The Torah gives us two signs for domesticated animals to determine their kosher status. Only if they have מפרסת פרסה ושסעת שסע פרסות, completely split hooves, and are מעלה גרה, that they chew their cud. The Torah lists four animals that have one of these two signs, but not both. The גמל, the camel, the שפן, the hyrax, and the ארנבת, the hare³, are all מעלה גרה, but don't have completely split hooves. In contrast, the חזיר, the pig, has split hooves (just like a cow). However, it does not chew its cud. This is for domesticated animals.

The Torah's method of teaching us the *kashrus* of birds is different. We're given a list of birds which are non-kosher, and the inference is that all other birds in the world are kosher. Is there anything that these non-kosher birds share in common, just like the non-kosher domesticated animals lack both kosher signs? Our Sages teach us⁴ that non-kosher birds are all predatory. Is there any understanding we can glean from all these signs of not being kosher? What makes chewing one's cud and having split hooves any more special than any other characteristic? Why is the Torah particular about us eating predatory birds?

The idea suggested by many early authorities⁵ is the source for the expression: You are what you eat. Meaning, characteristics found in animals are exuded and infused into those who consume them. Someone who therefore eats non-kosher birds will acquire characteristics which are common to predatory birds. One suggestion is that being predatory by nature implies that one is not satisfied with their lot. There's always a need to seek out new prey, and new delights. Someone who wants to avoid traits of jealousy or lusts will have a very hard time with their goals if they consume non-kosher birds. Their consumption will make the person more predatory-like, and therefore they will struggle to be satisfied with what Hashem gave them.

This trait of הסתפקות, being satisfied with one's lot, can also be lost by consuming non-kosher domesticated animals. Not having split hooves demonstrates a tendency to trample one's prey. This is similar to the predatory birds. This ferociousness clearly indicates that these animals aren't satisfied

¹ Based on the Vilna Gaon's Peirush HaGra Al Kama Aggados § 21 (to Bechoros 8b) s.v. וענין פשיטת הטלפים, printed in Peninim MiShulchan HaGra to Leviticus 11:3

² *Ibid* v. 4

³ I'm not going to get into it, but there are contemporary Rabbis who want to suggest that these traditional translations (which have their roots in some of the most famous Torah commentaries) for שפן and ארנבת, are mistaken, since these animals don't chew their cud in the conventional sense. If we were to broaden the definition of מעלה גרה to include their manner of eating, then there would be other animals too that only have one kosher sign, seemingly contradicting the *gemarra's* lesson that this list of four animals is exclusive (Chullin 59a with Rashi s.v. שאין לך). Therefore, they are forced to suggest that these terms refer to two animals which ruminate just like a camel does, yet must be extinct, as we don't know of any other animal that truly chews its cud and does not have split hooves

⁴ Chullin loc. cit.

⁵ Such as the Ramban to v. 13. See also Keli Yakar to v. 1-4

with what they have. As well, chewing one's cud shows contentedness with their lot. Such an animal isn't constantly on the prowl for more food. What they have is enough, and if they're hungry, they'll ruminate it and consume it again. Animals that don't chew their cud lack this trait, and could make it very difficult for their consumer to have הסתפקות.

The Torah uses the expression גרה מעלה גרה for animals that chew their cud. The word גרה appears elsewhere in the Torah, in a seemingly totally unrelated context. The currency the Torah uses is a *shekel*, which is a specific weight of silver. In order to calculate that weight, the Torah tells us⁶ that a *shekel* is equivalent to 20 גרה. The word גרה in that context is translated⁷ into Aramaic as מעה. We are taught⁸ that a מעה is two פונדיון, and a פונדיון is two איסרין. This means that the word גרה, which is a מעה, is four איסרין. What's the significance of this?

Let's say someone has a tremendous fortune. They definitely have more money than they need. Let's say they're satisfied with their lot. Is that so praiseworthy? True הסתפקות is only when a person has the bare minimum they need, both physically and psychologically. What if that's all they have, and they're not upset? On the contrary, they have a love of life. They're happy with their lot. That's true הסתפקות.

One of the Torah's gifts to the poor is known as *leket*, which are sheaves that fell during the harvest. These sheaves are designated for the poor to collect for themselves and their families. However, after a proscribed time, these sheaves become permitted for everybody. When is that? One opinion is⁹ once there's not enough left for the poor to take four איסרין worth of food. In those times, four איסרין would be enough to buy enough food for oneself and their spouse for one day¹⁰.

We see then that the word גרה connotes the minimum amount a person can live off of in a healthy way. It's the amount of money needed to buy a day's worth of food. It's also a necessary sign for a domesticated animal to be kosher. Someone who has acquired this trait of הסתפקות is never nervous about what tomorrow may bring. They don't constantly gather food in the event that they won't have enough¹¹. They take what they need and they're happy with that, and they trust that Hashem will provide them for tomorrow.

These are just some lessons we can learn from the Torah's laws of kosher animals. There are many more out there. We just need to seek them out.

Good Shabbos

⁶ Exodus 30:13

⁷ Targum Onkelos and Targum "Yonasan" ad. loc.

⁸ Kiddushin 12a

⁹ Peah 8:1

¹⁰ Rash MiShantz ad. loc.

¹¹ See Sotah 48b