



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפד Shemini Parshat

April 2, 2024

By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

I was once asked, “Rabbi, you say that Judaism is the only true religion; the Christians say that Christianity is, and the Moslems say that Islam is! How do you know you are right?”

I would like to add another layer to the question. There are over 2 billion Christians, over 1.3 billion Moslems, and 2 billion 153.7 million people of assorted other religions. Add to that the 1.1 billion people who have no religion at all and who say that we are all taking the opium for the masses. We, the Jewish people, number a mere 14 million, less than a quarter of one percent of the people who occupy our planet. What are the chances that we are the ones who have the one and only true religion?

When Hashem gave us the Torah, not only did He give us the prescription for how to live the most meaningful and wholesome life, He also laced the Torah with many powerful proofs that the Torah is true.

In this week’s portion we come across one such stunning proof. From it we see that only Hashem, the creator of the world and every creature in it, could have written the Torah. We will also see beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the Oral Torah – the explanation of the Written Torah - was given to Moshe together with the Written Torah.

In this week’s parsha Moshe Rabbeinu gives the Jewish people the laws of ***kosher*** – the animals we are allowed to eat. He also singles out a few non-kosher animals that we are not allowed to eat.

There are three main categories: sheep and cattle, birds, and fish. All insects, except for locusts, are by definition not kosher.

As far as which *animals* are kosher to eat, the Torah (Leviticus 11:2,3) gives a formula. It must have a completely split hoof and chew its cud.

(ב) דִּבְרוּ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֹאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר
עַל הָאָרֶץ:

(ג) כָּל מִפְרֹסֵת פְּרֹסָה וְשִׁסְעֵת שְׁסַע פְּרֹסֵת מְעֵלֶת גֵּרָה בַּבְּהֵמָה אֵתָּה תֹאכְלוּ

2) *Speak to the Children of Israel, saying; These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals that are upon the earth. 3) Everything among the animals that has a split hoof, with is completely separated into double hooves, and that brings up its cud – that one you may eat.*

The Talmud adds a few more signs, but before I cite those signs, I must first tell you about the Talmud.

The Talmud comprises the Oral Torah, the oral explanation of the commandments given by Hashem to Moshe along with the Written Torah. As Hashem instructed Moshe to write down each mitzvah, Hashem explained to Moshe every detail of how the mitzvah is to be performed. Moshe subsequently taught this to each and every member of the Jewish nation after he came down from Mount Sinai. The study of the Torah with the oral explanation is what occupied the Jewish people for the forty years in the desert and hasn't stopped since. This is what is studied in Yeshivot around the world today. It was written down over 1500 years ago.

The Talmud adds the following extra signs.

Any animal that has a completely split hoof, also chews its cud. You do not need to investigate if it does or not. It is a fact. If it has split hooves, it chews its cud.

Any animal that chews its cud, has teeth only in the bottom jaw of its mouth. The upper jaw has no teeth at all.

Any animal that has horns, has split hooves. And, as we said before, once you know it has split hooves, you know it chews its cud. Only kosher animals have horns.

Only the milk of a kosher animal will solidify to make butter or cheese. You cannot make butter or cheese from the milk of a non -kosher animal.

So, if you were on a safari somewhere in Africa, and you caught an animal with split hooves and you had no way of knowing if it chews its cud or not, based on this formula, you could slaughter it and eat it no questions asked. It would also have horns, and no teeth in its upper jaw.

Birds:

The Torah does not give a formula by which to determine which birds are kosher, and which are not. Rather, it lists by name the birds that we are not allowed to eat, and all the others are kosher. Here is the list: The eagle, the ossifrage, the osprey, the kite, the vulture family, the raven family, the ostrich, the owl, the gull, the hawk family, the falcon, the cormorant, the ibis, the swan, the pelican, the magpie, the stork, the heron family, the hoopoe and the bat.

Once I was learning this chapter in the Torah with someone, and after looking at the list of the forbidden birds, he exclaimed, "Wow! That's amazing!" I asked him what he was referring to and he said, "Every single one of these birds impales its prey and eats it!" I asked him how he knew this, and he answered, "I am a bird watcher, I know every one of these birds!"

My friend knew from his birdwatching a fact that the sages tell us in the Talmud. The common denominator in all the non-kosher birds listed is, that they are all vicious birds who kill other creatures and eat them.

All kosher animals are herbivorous and do not kill other creatures for their food.

Each statement made by the sages, has been scientifically verified over time. Every word they said is correct and accurate to a fault.

Fish:

Fish also have a formula. A fish must have both, fins and scales. If a fish has both fins and scales, it is a kosher fish. Once again, the Talmud teaches us, that any fish that has scales, has fins. If you see scales, you don't even have to look for the fins. But if it has fins, it does not mean that it has scales.

So here is the question. The Talmud was written in Babylon over 1500 years ago. Did the rabbis of the Talmud do expeditions to the jungles of the world to gather evidence for their statements before they made them? Do you think any of them ever saw a chamois or a bison? Did they go skin diving off the coast of Australia to know that every fish that has scales, has fins? How could they make such sweeping statements, which, if they are not true, would cause someone to eat non-kosher? Why make the statements at all? Why take a chance?

Another point. A kosher animal must have both signs at the same time, one will not do.

The Torah further states:

(ד) אֵדָּא אֵת זֶה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמַּעֲלֵי הַגֶּרֶה וּמִמְפָּרְסֵי הַפְּרִסָּה אֵת הַגָּמֶל כִּי מַעֲלֵה גֶרֶה
הוּא וּפְרִסָּה אֵינְנוּ מִפְּרִיס טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם :
(ה) וְאֵת הַשָּׁפָן כִּי מַעֲלֵה גֶרֶה הוּא וּפְרִסָּה לֹא יִפְרִיס טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם :
(ו) וְאֵת הָאֲרֵנְבֶת כִּי מַעֲלֵת גֶּרֶה הוּא וּפְרִסָּה לֹא הִפְרִיסָּה טָמֵאָה הוּא לָכֶם :
(ז) וְאֵת הַחֲזִיר כִּי מִפְּרִיס פְּרִסָּה הוּא וְשִׁסַּע וְשִׁסַּע פְּרִסָּה וְהוּא גֶרֶה לֹא יִגְר טָמֵא
הוּא לָכֶם :

4) But this is what you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or that have split hooves: the camel, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split – it is unclean to you. 5) and the hyrax, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split – it is unclean to you. 6) and the hare, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split – it is unclean to you. 7) and the pig, for its hoof is split and its hoof is completely separated, but it does not chew its cud – it is unclean to you.

The Talmud asks: How can you say, that when an animal has a split hoof, you can know for sure that it chews its cud. Just as the pig has a split hoof and doesn't chew its cud, maybe there are countless other animals like it?

Rabbi Yishmael answers: "Hashem who made the world knows that there is only one animal in the whole world that has split hooves and doesn't chew its cud, and that is the pig." So, as long as you know that what you have is not a pig, you can be sure that since it has split hooves it chews its cud.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חולין דף נט/א
דתנא דבי ר' ישמעאל ואת החזיר כי מפריס פרסה הוא שליט בעולמו יודע שאין
לך דבר שמפריס פרסה וטמא אלא חזיר לפיכך פרט בו הכתוב הוא

Similarly, the Talmud asks: How can you be sure from the fact that an animal has no upper teeth which indicates that it chews its cud, that it is a kosher animal? What about a baby camel that doesn't have upper its teeth yet, but it chews its cud and doesn't have a split hoof! Maybe there are others out there like it that don't have upper teeth but are not kosher?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חולין דף נט/א
דתני דבי ר' ישמעאל ואת הגמל כי מעלה גרה הוא שליט בעולמו יודע שאין לך
דבר מעלה גרה וטמא אלא גמל לפיכך פרט בו הכתוב הוא

Once again Rabbi Yishmael answers: Hashem who made the world knows that the only animals that chew their cud and don't have split hooves, are the camel, the hare and the hyrax. So, as long as you know what a camel looks like, you don't have to worry that an animal that has no upper teeth is not kosher.

Rabbi Yishmael deduced his concept from an extra word in the verse. The Torah says, "**It – the pig**" has a split hoof, implying that only the pig has a split hoof but does not chew its cud. "**It – the camel, the hyrax and the hare**" – implying that only **they** bring up their cud but don't have a split hoof. Only these four animals and no others have one of the two kosher signs.

It is remarkable that from the time the Torah was given until today, no animal has ever been found with only one of the two kosher signs, other than the four mentioned in the Torah.

(3) ילקוט שמעוני דברים - פרק יד - רמז תתצא
אמר רבי עקיבא וכי משה רבינו קניגי היה או בליסטרי הי ה, אלא מכאן תשובה
לאומרים אין תורה מן השמים.

Rabbi Akiva said: Was Moshe a hunter or a zoologist? How could he make these statements? Did he explore every jungle in the world? This is proof that the Torah was given by Hashem the creator!

Rabbi Akiva is telling us, the only one who could know all these facts, is the Creator Himself, Hashem. This proves that Hashem created the world and every creature in it.

Hashem revealed these facts to Moshe when he gave him the laws of the Kosher animals as part of the Oral Torah. These facts were part of the Oral Torah that were passed down from teacher to student all the way from Moshe Rabbeinu, who heard these facts from the manufacturer. Of course, Hashem who made every creature on the planet, and knows each creature and its properties very

intimately. Only Hashem could have come up with these formulas and facts.

When considering the breadth of knowledge known by the Sages, it becomes clear that the world had a Creator, and that it is impossible to say that things “evolved” and came about by themselves. Only the Creator could have revealed this information to man. How else could they know that only the milk of a kosher animal makes butter? It would take decades to test the milk of every animal and come up with such a conclusion. And who would have thought to even do the experiment?

Hashem has provided us with empirical proof that He gave the Torah and that every word in it is true.

There is yet another very important message hidden in the laws of kosher.

When we think of the laws of kosher we tend to place them in the category of an edict, a *חוק*, which is a law that we do not understand; one that we fulfill on faith alone.

However, upon careful examination of the text in the Torah we discover a deeper understanding of this most important commandment.

It starts with what seems to be a misspelled word in the Torah. When instructing us not to eat of the creatures that creep that are not permissible to us, the Torah tells us: (Leviticus 11:43)

(מג) אַל תִּשְׁקְצוּ אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכֹל הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם וְנִטְמַתֶּם בָּם :

43. Do not make yourselves abominable by means of any teeming thing; do not (spiritually) contaminate yourselves through them lest you become (spiritually) contaminated through them.

The word used in the Torah for spiritually contaminated is טמא. In the second occurrence in the verse (in bold) it is missing the letter “א”. Because of the vowels under the letters, it reads the same without the “א” as it does with the “א”, however, reading the word without the vowels, takes on a completely different meaning. The word without the “א” reads ונטמתם from the root word טמם which connotes an impediment or a blockage in something, preventing it from going forward.

There are no mistakes in the Torah, so the “*misspelled*” word is taken for its meaning as it is written without the vowels. The lesson is, that eating foods that are not kosher, creates an impediment and a blockage to spiritual progress in a person.

How are we to understand this idea?

In today’s world, with so much emphasis on the origin and quality of the food we eat, this is a no-brainer. As the saying goes, “You are what you eat.” This is why people want to eat healthy.

Since the food that we eat is broken down and used to form the very cells that comprise our bodies, the healthier the food we consume, the healthier the body.

We learn in Genesis that G-d created man from the dust of the earth and then breathed into him the breath of life, his soul. Thus, the human being is a miraculous synthesis between an earthy material body and a completely spiritual soul. The physical body serves as the host for the spiritual soul.

We can compare the relationship of the soul to the body to that of an electric current running through a copper wire. In the same way that the copper wire serves as a host or conductor for the electric current, so too the human body is the host for the soul, and serves as

the conductor for the spirituality of the soul. It is only through being in a physical body that the soul is able to function in this world. When the body is so debilitated that it can no longer operate, the soul must leave the body.

All electric wires are coated in rubber or plastic because rubber and plastic do not conduct electricity. Rather, they block the electric current flowing through the wire from reaching the person holding it, so he doesn't get a shock or worse, electrocuted. There are many substances that conduct electricity with varying degrees of impedance to the electric current running through them. Copper is the metal of choice because it strikes the right balance between cost and the speed of the current that flows through them. Today, there are materials called "superconductors" which don't impede the flow of the electricity through them at all.

The Torah is teaching us here, that since we are what we eat, and our bodies need to be the host for the holy soul within, we must consume only foods that are spiritually conducive to the flow of spirituality. G-d the creator of man, and the creator of all foods, has revealed to us in the Torah, which foods will allow our bodies to be superconductors, and which will be like rubber in our systems, and will create a blockage in the progress of souls, preventing them from spiritual growth.

All kosher foods are conducive to spirituality, while all non-kosher foods create a blockage in our system that impede our spiritual growth.

Along these lines, our Sages explain, that were we to eat the forbidden birds, the consumption of their flesh would have a negative effect on us making us vicious and malicious as well.

In today's day and age, there is almost no type of food that you cannot find kosher. Kosher has exploded, and it is not difficult at all to keep a kosher home. All it takes is a little care and attention when shopping, to buy the grocery items with a kosher sign on the package, instead of the one without. Why not maintain a healthy lifestyle both physically and spiritually and add kosher to your shopping list?

The laws of kosher provide us with irrefutable proof that Hashem created us and everything in the world. It is one of the many ways we know the Torah is true, and therefore, despite our small numbers compared to the other major religions, we stand fast in our commitment to keep all the laws of the Torah, because we know that it is true.