

SHEMINI (LEVITICUS 9:1-11:47)

What a Nice Pig!

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

The Torah gives us guidelines as to what we may and may not eat. We may eat animals that are "*Tahor*" – clean (whatever that means). We may not eat animals that are "*Tamei*" – unclean (whatever THAT means). (For the record, let me once again point out that the "cleanliness" referred to here has nothing to do with physical cleanliness. A pig is no cleaner than a cow, sheep or giraffe. [Yes, giraffe!] And having grown up on a chicken farm, I can tell you that a chicken's Kosher status is most definitely based upon its immaculate lifestyle!)

The Torah tells us that in order for a mammal to be Kosher, it must have split hooves and chew its cud. (Leviticus, 11:3) These two traits, for whatever reason, are considered signs of "Purity" that render them acceptable for consumption on a Kosher table. There is something positive about these characteristics that make them acceptable. Why these two? I don't know.

The Torah goes on to explain that in order to be Kosher, an animal must have BOTH attributes; either one by itself is unacceptable: *...the camel, since it chews its cud, and doesn't have a split hoof, is unclean . . . the pig, since it has a split hoof and doesn't chew its cud, is unclean . . .* (Ibid. verses 4 and 7)

This is actually a strange wording. The Torah already told us that one attribute alone is insufficient to be considered "*clean*"; you have to have both. Why does the Torah then detail the traits of the camel and the pig? Why not just say that an animal is not Kosher unless it has both attributes and then list those that don't?

I once heard a beautiful explanation from Rabbi Yissochar Frand. (He was quoting someone else; I don't remember whom.) The Torah, in discussing animals, is teaching us an essential message on how to think about PEOPLE.

A camel is not Kosher. There's nothing we can do about it. But, it chews its cud, and doesn't have a split hoof. IT CHEWS ITS CUD! It's got SOMETHING going for it. A pig is in the same situation. It has a split hoof and doesn't chew its cud. IT HAS A SPLIT HOOF! It's not all bad!

These animals do not qualify for Kashrus; they don't satisfy both requirements. But give them SOME credit. They're halfway there!

Let's face it. A camel doesn't care how you describe it, and a pig doesn't object to being non-Kosher. (If anything, they should be relieved. At least in OUR neighborhoods, they're safe! :-) But there's a lesson in sensitivity to be learned here.

The Torah doesn't tell us, "don't eat camel because it doesn't have split hooves." Rather, it says, "true, a camel chews its cud; it DOES have one Kosher requirement fulfilled. However, its lack of split hooves prevents it from being considered Kosher. A pig does have split hooves; it too has a Kosher trait. The problem is that it doesn't chew its cud."

The Torah makes it a point to look for the positive in non-Kosher animals. It emphasizes what is "Kosher" about a non-Kosher animal.

Wouldn't it be nice if we made it a point to do the same thing when we judge people?

(For another thought on "kosher" pigs, see "What Lovely Kosher Pig's Feet You Have!")

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

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