

SHEMINI (LEVITICUS 9:1-11:47)

Kosher Cardiology

2011 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

PARSHAS PARAH

This Shabbos we will take out two Torah scrolls. In the first, we will read “Shemini”, the regularly scheduled weekly Portion. Next, we will read, from a second Torah scroll, the section of "*Parah Adumah*," the Red Heifer.

The Red Heifer is a Mitzvah that is, in all due respect, totally illogical. (At least it's illogical to humans. The great King Solomon himself couldn't figure out the deep meaning that G-d had invested into this apparently contradictory Mitzvah.)

The ashes of the Red Heifer were used for purification. If a person had come in contact with a corpse, either by direct contact (e.g., a doctor) or having entered a cemetery, he would be considered "*Tamei*," ritually defiled. Such a person would not be permitted to enter the Temple or eat "sacred foods," such as the *Korban Pesach*, the Passover Offering of roasted lamb at the Seder. Part of the purification process involved being sprinkled with a solution that included, among other things, the ashes of a totally red heifer.

The reason for this additional Torah Reading is that with Passover right around the corner, we are busy preparing our homes for the coming Yom Tov. We need to remember the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer because it is supposed to be part and parcel of our Passover preparations. Every year at the Seder, we conclude our meal with a “dessert” of Matzah called *Afikoman*. The *Afikoman* serves as an interim replacement for the Passover Offering that may only be offered when the Temple is standing. When the Temple is rebuilt, hopefully soon, we will have to participate in the Red Heifer purification ceremony. That way, we will be able to replace our Matzah *Afikoman* with a savory desert of roasted lamb, as required by the Torah.

You can read more about the Red Heifer by clicking [here](#) , [here](#), or [here](#).

“Kosher Cardiology”

These are the animals you may eat... But this you may not eat...Do not make yourselves abominable ... lest you become contaminated through them. (Leviticus, 11:2, 4, 43)

... lest you become contaminated through them. Consumption of non-Kosher food contaminates you. That is why even young children, who are exempt from such essential commandments as Sabbath observance, fasting on Yom Kippur, and eating Matzah on Passover, must refrain from eating non-Kosher food. We must give them Kosher formula and Kosher baby food. We don't want to contaminate our children.

There is nothing wrong with pork and shellfish per se. These are appropriate foods that G-d has given to the Children of Noah for consumption.

But the Children of Israel have a different responsibility:

For I am G-d who elevates you from the Land of Egypt to be a G-d to you; you shall be holy, for I am holy. (Ibid, verse 45)

Usually, when discussing the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah says "... I am G-d who **brought you out of Egypt...**" Here, He is G-d **who elevates you from the Land of Egypt...**

The Commentaries state that the point of the Kosher laws is to elevate us. By refraining from forbidden foods we uplift ourselves spiritually and become closer to G-d.

What is it about some foods that causes them to lift us up, while others bring us down? In what way are chickens and trout holier than pigs and swordfish? How does beef lift me up while clams bring me down?

I don't know if the individual animals are the point of it all. G-d expects us to engage in self-control. We can't just live a life of excess, helping ourselves to any and every physical pleasure that entices us.

The Talmud offers an alternative translation to ... lest you become **contaminated** through them. It can also be understood to mean ... lest you become **dulled** through them. Consumption of non-kosher food is said to cause a "dulling of the heart." A person who ignores the Kosher laws desensitizes himself to the nuances of spirituality. Somehow, when you eat *Treif* you "harden your spiritual arteries", and, as a result, find it more difficult to serve G-d.

You are what you eat. You can't spend a lifetime eating junk food and expect to maintain perfect teeth, weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol. The poison takes its toll.

That's why we make sure our children only eat strictly Kosher. We want to start them off right. We want to elevate their souls and open their hearts to holiness.

Yes, you are what you eat. You are also what you see, what you read, and what you hear.

I watched a lot of T.V. when I was a kid. (That's one of the reasons I made sure not to have one in my home when I became an adult!) I sometimes find myself humming theme songs from some of the silly shows I used to watch. FROM 40+ YEARS AGO!!!

Now, one could make the argument that there was nothing “*Treif*” about “Leave it to Beaver” and “Get Smart.” (One could also argue the other way, but I won't go there right now.) But many of **today's** television programs even have **titles** that I'd be embarrassed to write on this page! What subtle (and not-so-subtle!) influence does our exposure to all this junk have on our spiritual well-being?

And what, of course, about the Internet? Yes, there are many wonderful things we can do with this valuable tool. There is also unbridled filth that is available to our children (and ourselves!) with a few simple clicks.

It can contaminate you. It can dull you. It can make you spiritually sick. It can lower you to a level where you are totally out of sync with, and unfazed by, the holy teachings of the Torah.

Keep Kosher. Keep Kosher in thought, word, and deed. It will uplift you. It will inspire you. It will make you holy.

Have a great Shabbos.

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