

SHEMINI: KEEPING KOSHER

Vayikra (Leviticus), Chapter 11. Plaut: 712-17 (old edition, 814-23)

Akedat Yitzchak on Shemini (60:1:3 - Sefaria translation)
Rabbi Isaac ben Moses Arama (Spain, c. 1420 – 1494)

On no account is the legislation of forbidden foods to be seen in the context of contributing to or detracting from physical well-being or one's bodily health. If this legislation had hygiene, such as sanitary considerations, as its objective, it would reduce Torah to being a medical textbook, and a very abbreviated one at that. This thought is unpalatable, if only for the fact that many of the health hazards in certain foods could be neutralized by the use of spices and other preservatives. Since we observe many nations who do eat foods that we consider untouchable enjoy good health, it is clear that the legislation is not aimed at our physical health, but rather at our mental (spiritual) health.

The Dietary Laws (Nechama Liebowitz, *Studies in Vayikra*, pp. 81 and 84)

Indeed we live in an age of wonder drugs and ideal hygienic conditions prompting many to invalidate the dietary laws on these grounds. Their mistake is in providing a motivation for them in accordance with their own predilections. Once the motivation or reason is inapplicable, the precept becomes invalid for them as well.

The *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* makes the point that this was what prompted the Torah to furnish no specific reason for the commandment:

You should know that the cause and effect of these prohibitions were not divulged - for our benefit, lest people with scientific pretensions should argue: The deleterious effects attributed by the Torah to this food is only applicable in certain climates and with certain types of people. To save us from falling into this pitfall the reason was not revealed...

...According to the above, the more we try to find a reason for these precepts, and show that the foods and defilements concerned are intrinsically destructive to both body and soul, destructive of national existence, the more we persist in rationalizations of these precepts, the further we will divorce ourselves from the true reason - the fulfillment of the will of God.

The Unspoken Truths about the Dietary Laws (Rabbi Tamar Kamionkowski)
www.929.org.il/lang/en/author/44687/post/44954

...Recently, I have found myself asking a different kind of question about the dietary laws. Given that our ancestors lived on a diet based primarily of grains, dairy and fruits, why doesn't Leviticus 11 address these day-to-day foods? Instead of referring to Leviticus 11 as "the dietary laws," why don't we refer to this chapter as "the carnivore's guide?" After all, the chapter is not really about the foods that Israelites regularly ate!

Studies have shown that the average farm had a few goats and/or sheep. Cows were too expensive to maintain due to the amount of food and water they required. Meat eating may have been restricted to special festive holidays. So who ate meat on a more regular basis? Perhaps the priests, but most certainly only the wealthy elite. And when would they have eaten meat? During sacred festivals. In fact, a rabbinic text teaches that only those men who studied Torah were worthy of eating meat, while the commoner was best off with a vegetarian diet. (*Pesachim* 49b)

By referring to Leviticus 11 as the chapter about dietary laws or the first stages of keeping kosher, we raise up the practice of the wealthy elite, while rendering the real diets and the preparation of day-to-day food invisible.

Scholars have noted that in antiquity, women were in charge of transforming raw grains into edible breads and cereals. In fact, women devoted several hours every day to prepare grains to feed their families.

When we think about our ancestors' eating practices only through the lens of the biblical dietary laws, we are liable to forget who prepared the food and what people really ate. If meat-eating, which only the wealthy could enjoy on a regular basis, is the only kind of eating that is associated with the sacred, then the people were largely left out.

Culinary Visions Of The Afterlife (Professor Marc Bregman, North Carolina in Greensboro)
www.929.org.il/lang/en/page/101/post/44956

What is the reward for “keeping kosher” in this life? Could it be that tref will be on the menu in the world to come?! In interpreting Leviticus Chapter 11, concerning which animals are permitted and which are prohibited to be eaten, the Midrash (Leviticus Rabbah 13:3) addresses this question in a dramatic visualization of the afterlife:

In the Future, Behemoth and the Leviathan [mythic beasts mentioned in Job Chapter 40 and elsewhere] will do battle for the righteous in a wild-beast spectacle. And those who have not gone to see such pagan gladiatorial games in this life, will be rewarded to see the supreme spectacle in the World to Come. But how will these two gigantic beasts be slaughtered? With its horns, Behemoth will gore Leviathan, and with its fins, Leviathan will slash Behemoth. The righteous ask: “But is this a permissible method of slaughter?! Have we not learnt [Mishnah Hullin 1:2] that kosher slaughter is not permitted with teeth or nail? The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Torah shall go forth from Me (Isaiah 51:4) – A new Torah teaching will go forth from Me. And then, in the Future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make a banquet for his righteous servants. And those who have not eaten nevelot and trefot [forbidden animals/meats] in this world will be rewarded to partake of them in the World to Come...

This highly imaginative Midrash raises some fundamental questions: Is the reward for observing halakhic prohibitions in this life, their being permitted in the afterlife? What will the “New Torah” to be revealed by God in the Messianic Age be like? Whatever answers we may offer now, in the Future, we will know.