

# JewishTimes

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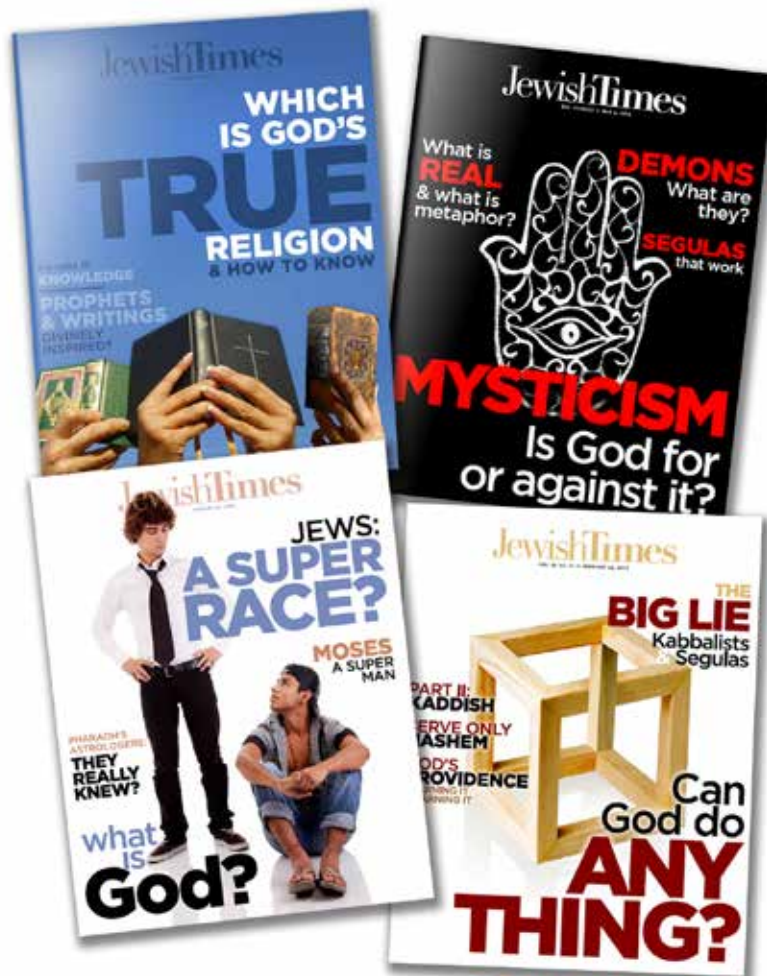
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## LETTERS

### After a Torah class? What?!

**Rivkah:** I attend a weekly Torah class for women. Each week I greet a homeless man and buy him a coffee. He waits outside the class in the hopes of collecting a few dollars here and there.

After a recent class, the poor man asked a woman for tzedaka, charity. She was leaving the class. She responded, "Don't come near me!" I was appalled, and the man was frightened. Simply unbelievable.

Immediately after learning Torah, a Jew reacts this way?! How shameful.

It is so clear that Torah classes need to take the next step and ask the attendees how they will apply what they learn. It is a great thing to study Torah, but at times, I fear, women and perhaps men, simply attend to feel good about themselves, or for social interaction. We need to address the needs of our homeless and poor people. We must be gentle and kind. We must be patient and sympathetic. And we must speak up when we see such injustice. ■



# Kosher...

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# What is its Purpose?

**What is God's reasoning behind diet & prohibiting certain species? Are their signs a hint?**

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**D**o you know why God gave us kosher laws? More than most laws, kosher has become iconic of Jewish observance. And this is not without cause. Many times in His Torah[1], God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

*"Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified (Lev. 11:23-25)."*

In our first source, God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him, "sanctified." The avoidance of disgusting behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctification work? What is "sanctity"? How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? (How is one related to the other?) Rashi says[2] abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi's point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally "abhor" (shekktetz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? Why isn't abstention from eating sufficient?

The Torah goes very far in distancing us from many species. We can eat all fruits and vegetables; there is no restriction as is the case regarding animals. Why? And what is it specifically about "creeping" things that it is a predominant theme among creatures we are prohibited to eat? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is

harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

## Deciphering God's Clues

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say[3] that although in the Torah, birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Interesting...most signs indicating a species' kosher or non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering.

Now, let's start making steps to answer our questions...

## Locomotion & Kosher

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life – beings with locomotion – engenders human identification. We don't identify with inanimate objects, like plants, rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinctions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

## Kosher is a Barrier

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating

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snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and numbs his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these restraining walls. In contrast, people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse, eat disgusting species, forfeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer “sanctified”. Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is invoked by certain types of creatures. A wise Rabbi once suggested that things that creep on the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. “...Also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end (Koheles 3:11).” This verse refers to God’s design of man’s immortality fantasy. (Ibn Ezra, *ibid*) God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These species disgust us due to their association with death. This disgust is reinforced through the prohibition of contact with them.

Eating is one of our two primary drives. Sex is the other. The Rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on this. God restricts the Jew’s involvement in satisfying these core instincts

so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: “Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry’ (Tal. Succah 52b).” Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy an instinct, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God’s Torah.

Abstaining from lusts, and from eating any creature, suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating “disgusting” creatures, we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don’t only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area, without our entire emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts. (Exod. 32:6) The satisfaction of one emotion – idolatry – causes all other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, abstaining from contact with certain species helps to control all other emotions.

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting

that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group, that of mammals[4]. Also interesting is that mammals alone are the one group in which we do not find the word “disgusting” (*shekketz*). Instead, they are called “*tammy*” or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered, to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit – in abstaining from pawed creatures – is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man, who differs from animals in our speech and creative abilities. Paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles man, the greater the identification. It’s a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God’s creatures. Therefore, God also prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then

***“Eating snakes, rats and spiders, man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and numbs his sense of loathsomeness. But God wishes man to preserve this disgust, which thereby benefits all our behaviors through these restraining walls.”***

not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are thereby kept in check.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl, like snakes and

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spiders. God tells us this in the quote above. He created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through abstaining from eating or touching many creatures. Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi's point, that the path to living an intelligent life is paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, this warranted God's Egyptian Exodus.

### Summary

At first, we wonder at the various species, why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law?

We then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the

Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our inner emotional makeup, rarely examined, and many times rejected. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts. We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via abstaining from pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them too, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Creator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's words will then be fulfilled as the nations remark, "What a wise and understanding people is this great nation." "For what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as this entire Torah (Deut. 4:6,8)." ■

### FOOTNOTES

[1] Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3.

[2] Lev. 11:45

[3] Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

[4] Lev. 11:1-8



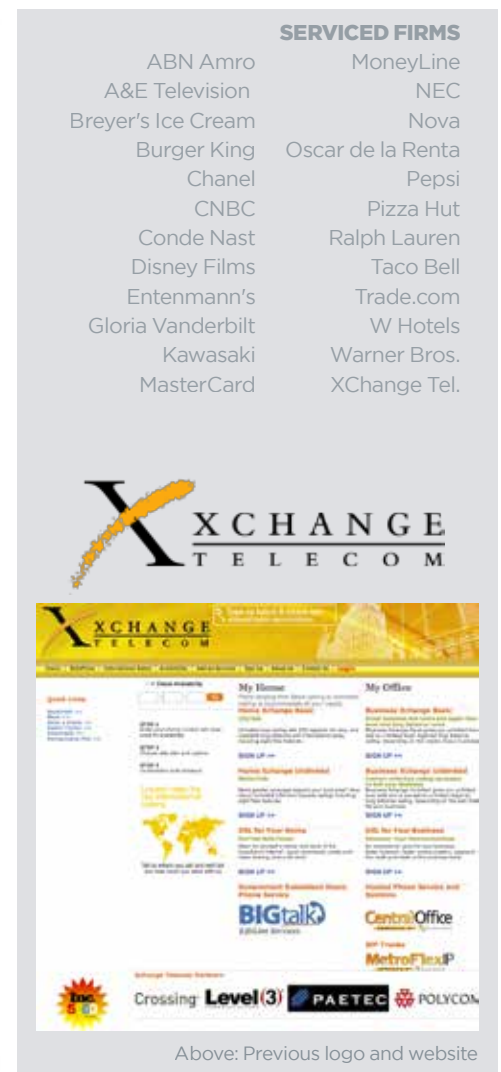
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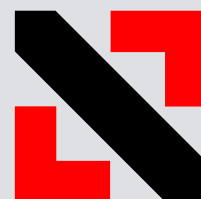
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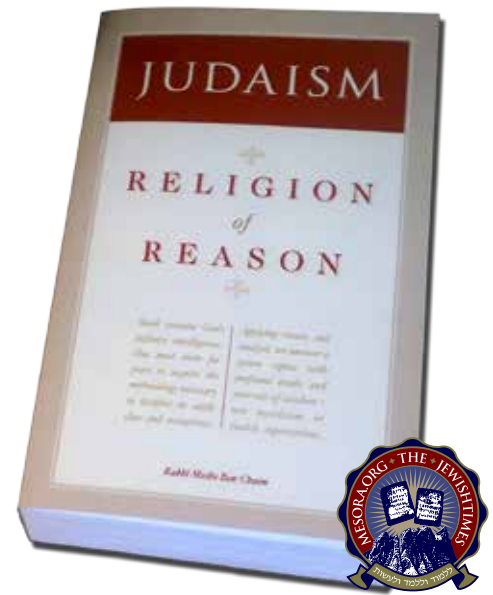
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**SINGLES**

# DATING CRISIS

## Steps Towards a Cure

**RABBI PINNY ROSENTHAL**  
Exec. Dir. Manhattan Jewish Experience

**D**ennis Prager, the author and radio show host said that when he was dating he was obsessed with what he called “MITIAW”, the Most Important Trait in a Woman. He said that after each date he’d call his good friend Joseph Telushkin, who is now another prominent Jewish author and tell him what the MITIAW really

was. After one date it would be personality, after another it was physi-

cal attractiveness, after another it was intelligence, and after yet another it was good values.

One night after Dennis came back from a date he called his friend Joseph and was about to tell him yet again what the REAL MITIAW was. But before he could tell him, his friend interrupted and said, “Dennis, don’t tell me, I know exactly what you’ll say”. “How can you possibly know?” Dennis asked him, “You don’t even know the woman I went out with”. “It doesn’t matter”, he replied, “You’re about to announce that the Most Important Trait in a Woman

is whatever trait tonight’s date didn’t have”. And so that’s why these lists of the things that young people have so often have in their minds aren’t always helpful because they constantly change.

I work with Jewish single professionals in their 20/30’s in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. As a rabbi, I do pastoral sessions with these young people. One challenge of this “shidduch (dating) crisis” is the multiplicity of choice. Imagine: a couple is sitting in at Talia’s steakhouse on Amsterdam Ave. on their first date. As the night progresses and they share their well-worn date stories one to another, a series of young, attractive men and women come through the doors of the restaurant all night long. The feeling each one may have is this: he/she is good/great but the one that just came through the doors is even better looking!

“The Paradox of Choice - Why More Is Less” is a 2004 book by American psychologist Barry Schwartz. In the book, Schwartz argues that eliminating consumer choices can greatly reduce anxiety for shoppers. The fear that you have chosen the wrong product, at the wrong price, in the wrong color, is a source of anxiety for many. Many wonderful singles dating in Manhattan with its endless choices, cannot get married for the fear that they have simply settled. Some have actually moved to smaller communities outside NY and have –WITHIN THE YEAR – gotten married to one of the few Jewish singles available in the community! Barry Schwartz relates the ideas of psychologist Herbert A. Simon from the 1950s to the psychological stress that most consumers face today. He notes some important distinctions between what Simon termed, maximizers and satisficers. A maximizer is like a perfectionist, someone who needs to be assured that their every purchase or decision was the best that could be made. The way a maximizer knows for certain is to consider all the alternatives they can imagine. This creates a psychologically daunting task, which can become even more daunting as the number of options increases. The



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alternative to maximizing is to be a satisficer. A satisficer has criteria and standards, but a satisficer is not worried about the possibility that there might be something better. Ultimately, Schwartz agrees with Simon's conclusion, that satisficing is, in fact, the maximizing strategy.

So what are we supposed to teach our children to look for in a mate? What criteria and standards should they have? Parshas Chaye Sara provides some valuable insights. It takes up the story of Avraham's plans for obtaining a wife for Yitzchak. He charged his servant Eliezer, in whose wisdom and integrity he had great confidence, to return to the land of his birth and find there a suitable mate for the next patriarch of the Jewish nation. He warned Eliezer not to allow his son to marry any woman from Canaan. He also prohibited him from uprooting Yitzchak from the land. If Eliezer could not persuade the woman he chose to come to Canaan the match would be off. Avraham set clear criteria and standards for Eliezer. You can understand the daunting nature of the challenge confronting Eliezer. He was fully committed to the ideals in which Avraham lived. He recognized the greatness of Yitzchak and that he was destined to continue the work and perpetuate the teachings of his father.

Eliezer's first decision was to go to the place where the young women he was looking for would gather, i.e., the watering holes. This may seem obvious, but it teaches an important lesson, namely, that whenever possible one should see things for himself. He wanted a personal encounter with the young lady who would catch his attention. So many singles today are suggested a name, look the person up on facebook, date the person in their mind for 3 minutes, decide that the other person is not for them and do not even bother to meet the other person.

Eliezer also engaged in prayer. The primary reason is because he realized how much he would need Divine assistance. Whenever one is engaged in very significant matters he should recognize his limitations and turn to his Creator for support and guidance.



Prayer also has a practical benefit as it causes a person to clarify his thoughts and focus on those things that are truly important. This is vital for everyone and certainly for the singles who want to get married. One should consider, "What are my essential requirements for a partner? What do I truly need? What qualities in a potential spouse are worthy enough to request from the Creator of the universe?" Too many people are fixated on the superficial aspects of the mate they are searching for and base the bulk of their decision on looks and personality. The Torah does not disparage the importance of the externals. In fact, the Torah points out about Rivka, that the girl was "extremely good looking" and clearly this factored into Eliezer's decision that she was "the one." However, the Torah makes a clear distinction between "inner" and "outer" qualities. What matters most is a person's character which is comprised of virtues and values. Is the person wise, helpful, just,

compassionate and committed to higher causes? Eliezer devised a test to gain an insight into the "stuff" of which Rivka was made. He would ask her for a drink of water and she would respond positively, but then of her own accord, also offer to provide water for all of his camels. One of my teachers, Rabbi Reuven Mann pointed out that Eliezer would not ask her to water the camels: she would have to come up with this herself. Thus, it wasn't so much that she would be willing to interrupt her own chores and perform the arduous task of providing water for ten camels. What counted most was that she volunteered to do this without being asked. The true character of a person is reflected in how they act in situations where there are no formal obligations. This is called, "Lifnim Mishurat Hadin" (beyond the requirements of the Law). Her behavior revealed that she practiced chessed (kindness) not out of obligation but because her heart and soul was fully directed to goodness and kindness.

Eliezer recognized that her superficial beauty was important in enabling her to be successful in her role as the second Matriarch. However, what won him over was her inner essence of wisdom and love of chessed which his test was designed to uncover. Eliezer was a satisficer – he knew what was important to build the Jewish people. He was not a maximizer.

Whenever I sit with a single who is dating and who is uncertain if they should proceed with the relationship, I ask them 4 "satisficer" questions:

- 1) Are you attracted?
- 2) Do you enjoy being together?
- 3) Will your partner be a fine parent?
- 4) Do you share similar values?

If the answer is yes to all 4, I encourage the relationship. I urge singles to be satisficers and not maximizers. I encourage them not confuse settling with being realistic.

May all of us see our children and grandchildren find the proper spouse to build a Bayit Nee'man Be' yisrael and be a source of nachas to all of us and Klal Yisrael. ■



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# A THOUGHT PROVOKING DIET

## KOSHER LAWS

RABBI BERNIE FOX



AND HASHEM SPOKE TO MOSHE, SAYING: SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, SAYING: IF A WOMAN CONCEIVES AND BEARS A MALE CHILD, THEN SHE SHALL BE IMPURE SEVEN DAYS; AS IN THE DAYS OF THE IMPURITY OF HER MENSTRUATION SHE SHALL BE IMPURE. (SEFER VAYIKRA 12:1-2)

### 1. Impurity in human beings and other creatures

This week two parshiyot are read – Tazriah and Metzarah. The reading continues the presentation that began in the previous parasha – Parshat Shemini. The overarching topic of the presentation is tumah and taharah – ritual impurity and purity. Depending on context, the implications of an object or creature's tumah and taharah differ. In general, when a person is tamey – contracts tumah – the impurity renders the person unfit to participate in sacrificial service and to consume sanctified foods. With the restoration of taharah, the person is again fit for these activities. When other organic creatures are tamey, the appellation means that they may not be consumed. Creatures that are tahor – that are “pure” – may be consumed.

The Torah begins its discussion of tumah with an enumeration of those creatures that are tamey – that may not be eaten. Tazria and Metzora continue this

discussion and deal primarily with tumah engendered in human beings through natural biological processes such as childbirth or disease. The discussion emphasizes tzara'at. Tzara'at is a skin disease that afflicts a person as a consequence of moral degeneracy and renders a person tamey.

### 2. Tumah, taharah, and the order of creation

The Midrash makes an interesting comment of the Torah's treatment of tumah and taharah in the previous Parasha and in this week's Torah reading. It explains that the order in which the various objects of tumah and taharah are discussed reflects the order of their creation as described in Sefer Beresheit.[1] The reason that this comment is so interesting is that it seems to be only partially accurate. The Torah's discussion of tumah and taharah begins with identification of the animals living on dry land that are tahor – whose consumption is permitted. These animals

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have both split hooves and regurgitate. The tamey animals – those that are prohibited – lack one or both of these characteristics. Then the Torah turns its attention to aquatic creatures and explains that the permitted – tahor – creatures have fins and scales. This is followed by an enumeration of those winged creatures that are tamey – whose consumption is prohibited. Finally, the Torah discusses tumah and taharah – spiritual impurity and purity resultant from natural human biological processes or from disease – as they apply to human beings.

In its discussion of creation, the Torah explains that human beings were created after the other organic creatures. However, in its description of the creation of these other creatures, the Torah explains that Hashem first created the aquatic and winged creatures. Their emergence was followed by the creation of land-based creatures. The last creature created was the human being. The table below summarizes and compares the order in which organic creatures are discussed in the two presentations:

| ORDER OF CREATION  | TUMAH / TAHARAH    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Aquatic & winged   | Land-based animals |
| Land-based animals | Aquatic creatures  |
| Human beings       | Winged creatures   |
|                    | Human beings       |

In short, the common element in both discussions is that each deals with the human being only after discussion of other organic creatures. However, the two presentations differ in the order in which they discuss these other creatures. How should the Midrash's comments be understood?

*Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth? (Sefer Isaiah 40:21)*

*Lift up your eyes on high, and see. Who has created these? He that brings out their host by number, He calls them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one fails. (Sefer Isaiah 40:26)*

### 3. Appreciating the wonder of the created universe

As a starting point, it will helpful to consider the Midrash's comments more carefully. The Midrash does not explain why the Torah's discussion of tumah and taharah follows the order of creation. However, Rabbaynu Yonah[2] makes a remarkable suggestion as to the lesson communicated by the Torah in its adoption of the creation order. He begins by explaining that the above passages provide an insight into the message of the Torah's account of creation. Isaiah is directing our attention to the created universe and its creatures as expressions of the infinite wisdom of the creator. Similarly, the Torah, through its account of creation, is advising that we contemplate and consider the remarkable revelation of Hashem's unfathomable wisdom that is exhibited even in His most simple creature. We are commended by the Torah to consider the mysteries of our own bodies and the endless genius to be discovered in every function of the human body. Rabbaynu Yonah adds that the message of the Midrash is that by borrowing this order and using it in its discussion of tumah and taharah, the Torah is suggesting that we also consider the wisdom revealed in the created universe in this context.[3] In order to fully appreciate Rabbaynu Yonah's comments, another issue must be considered.

*For I am Hashem your G-d; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy; neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of swarming thing that moves upon the earth. (Sefer VaYikra 11:44)*

### 4. Creating boundaries

As explained above, the terms tumah and taharah in the context of non-human creatures are synonymous with prohibited and permitted to be eaten. In other words, the terms relate to the creatures as objects of human instinct.

Understanding these creatures in this framework resolves two issues. First, it provides some insight into the nature of their restriction. Rav Soloveitchik Zt"l explains that one of the fundamental

themes of the Torah's mitzvot is the establishment of boundaries. The boundaries that we put in place and the limits that we establish differentiate the human being from the beast.[4] One of these boundaries is established by the Torah through its creation of tamey and tahor species – prohibited and permitted species.

The creation of boundaries also expresses another important outlook of the Torah. The Torah does not admonish us against enjoying the pleasures of the material world. Instead, it proposes that we experience these pleasures in moderation. The creation of boundaries communicates the message of moderation and nurtures this temperate behavior.[5]

Viewed from the paradigm of boundaries, the order in which the Torah discusses the tumah and taharah of non-human creatures is appropriate. The discussion begins with those creatures we most desire to consume – land animals. The discussion progresses to aquatic creatures. Lastly, fowl are treated. This is the order that is appropriate in dealing with these creatures as objects of instinctual desire.

### 5. Tumah, taharah, and human development

It can be assumed Rabbaynu Yonah recognizes that the order in which these creatures are treated is reflective of their appeal to our instinctual desires. However, his point is that non-human creatures are placed before humans in the discussion of tumah and taharah and this adds another element to the discussion. It makes the discussion also reflective of their order in creation. In other words, the Torah is utilizing a dual-determined order. The overall order is determined by the order of creation – non-human creatures precede human beings. The order within the discussion of non-human creatures is determined by their instinctual appeal. What is the message of this dual-determined order?

It seems that according to Rabbaynu Yonah, the Torah is attempting to inform the manner in which we relate to our

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surroundings. Instinctual or natural-man relates to his surroundings as objects of instinctual desire. His assessment of objects and the importance that he assigns to each is determined by its capacity to satisfy desire. Furthermore, natural-man does not relate to only the external world through this paradigm but also to himself. The demanding call of his desires is constant and the pressure of desire informs how he defines himself.

It is important to not confuse the natural-man with the primitive. The term "natural-man" represents an attitude and outlook. It is not a reference to an anthropological stage of human development. Natural-man is as common to the twenty-first century as to prehistoric times; he is as common to civilized society as to a primitive jungle tribe.

According to Rabbaynu Yonah, the Torah is directing us to relate to the external world and even ourselves as expressions of Hashem's infinite wisdom. The Torah's treatment of tumah and taharah is designed to encourage us to notice, contemplate, and rejoice in the wisdom that not only surrounds us but is found within us. Rabbaynu Yonah adds that if we can reorient ourselves and replace natural-man's instinctual view of the world with an appreciation of this wisdom, then we will be aware of the presence of Hashem's influence in every creature and every breath. We will be inspired to thank Hashem and to love Him.[6]

## 6. A two-step process of reorientation

Rabbaynu Yonah is attributing to the Torah the design of a two-step process that encourages this reorientation from the perspective of natural-man to an appreciation of the Divine wisdom revealed in creation. The process begins with the establishment of boundaries. The boundaries endow the objects of our desire and even ourselves with halachic status. The external world and the self are converted by the Torah's laws from the material treated by instinct to objects of contemplation and study. A cow is no longer just the source of a steak; it is an animal whose consumption is permitted



based on halachic criteria, which must be slaughtered properly, and suitably prepared for the table. The cow becomes the subject of tomes of halachic analysis and discussion.

Second, through endowing the objects of desire with halachic status and thereby, converting them into objects of study, our entire orientation toward these objects and toward ourselves is impacted. Once we have accustomed ourselves to looking beyond the paradigm of human instinct and desire, we are prepared to consider these creatures and even ourselves from the perspective of creation and as revelations of Hashem's endless wisdom. With the achievement of this reorientation and the adoption of a contemplative attitude toward the world and toward ourselves, we recognize the wisdom exhibited in the created universe and we appreciate and love Hashem. ■

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Midrash Rabbah, Parshat Tazria 14:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Yonah of Gerona was a renowned medieval scholar. He is best known for his commentary on Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi's Halachot. That work was actually composed by Rabbaynu Yonah's students. He is also the author of Shaarai Teshuvah – an extensive work on the mitzvah of repentance. Rabbaynu Yonah also composed a series of derashot or sermons on the weekly portion. These were published from manuscript in 1980.

[3] Rabbaynu Yonah ben Avraham of Gerona, Commentary on the Torah, Parshat Tazria.

[4] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Festival of Freedom (KTAV, 2006), pp.70-72.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Dey'ot 3:1.

[6] Rabbaynu Yonah ben Avraham of Gerona, Commentary on the Torah, Parshat Tazria.

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# A Righteous Parent

**Rabbi Reuven Mann**

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



## PARSHA

# Why parenting is juxtaposed to punishments

**RABBI REUVEN MANN**  
Rabbi, Young Israel of Phoenix



**T**his week's parsha, Tazria, begins with laws pertaining to the status of a woman who has given birth to a child. Of course, this event constitutes a great simcha (joy) for the parents and their families. However, according to Torah law, childbirth confers a state of ritual impurity (tumah) upon the mother. While in this state, she is prohibited from partaking of or coming into contact with sacrificial food.

The duration of this state is 33 days when she gives birth to a son and 66 days when she has a daughter. At the culmination of this period, she brings an elevation offering and a sin offering to the Temple and is restored to a state of ritual purity (taharah). These laws have no practical significance in contemporary life, as we do not have the Temple and the sacrificial service. Even so, all the mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah contain profound ideas of eternal relevance and must therefore be studied seriously.

A number of questions must be raised. First of all, what is it about childbirth that incurs ritual impurity? One of the most exalted mitzvot of the Torah is "Be fruitful and multiply." To bring children into the world and to afford them a proper upbringing is to participate with Hashem in fulfilling the mandate to populate the world and perfect it.

Moreover, we are curious about the necessity for the mother to bring sacrifices. One of them, the sin offering, clearly implies that some transgression has been committed. This is difficult to comprehend, given that the woman has endured 9 months of pregnancy and the ordeal of labor and childbirth. One would think that she deserves a reward for her efforts, and certainly would not be treated like a "sinner" in need of atonement.

It is also interesting that the chapter on women in childbirth is juxtaposed with that of tzara'at. This subject deals with discolorations that

affected the houses, clothing, and bodies of individuals who were guilty of certain sins. These plagues were a manifestation of Divine punishment for major infractions, the most prominent being evil speech (lashon hara). At first glance, there seems to be no relation between the subjects of tzara'at and childbirth. Yet, the Torah saw fit to connect them. What lesson does this impart?

Why does the Torah confer ritual impurity on a woman who has performed such a noble mitzvah and brought new life into the world? In my opinion, the supreme importance of this mitzvah is the reason for the special laws that pertain to mothers. It is conveying to us that childbirth cannot be restricted only to its biological aspects. The goal is not merely to reproduce the species in a purely physical sense. Rather, it is to foster the existence of something unique, a being endowed with a divine soul who will live a life that reflects the image of the Creator.

During pregnancy, the mother is not in her "normal" state; she is virtually consumed by the maternal instinct, which was, itself, responsible for her desire to bear a child. There is no force in the animal kingdom more powerful than the maternal instinct. One should avoid any threatening contact with an animal that is protecting its young.

Giving birth is the most intense emotional experience a human being can have. It makes a dramatic impact on both parents, but the woman's experience is unique, engendering powerful emotions of joy, but also of anger and even resentment. In the aftermath of childbirth, she must reorient herself psychologically and spiritually, to enter the second phase of the reproductive process, that of

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raising the child. She must take a step back and make way for the third "partner" in the endeavor, the Creator. That is why the verse states that, on the eighth day, "the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." This command is contrary to the maternal instinct, which seeks to protect the child from all pain.

The mother (and, by extension, the father) must go through a process of spiritual transformation marked by deep introspection. Her thoughts should be focused on the true purpose of life and the genuine goals of parenting. Is the objective to satisfy the maternal and paternal instincts, or is there a greater ideal to strive for? At the onset of a new life, parents should reexamine their values and philosophy of life. They should also be involved in genuine teshuva (repentance).

The Rambam says that the true penitent changes his name, as if to say, I am a new person, not the one who committed the sin. So, too, when a parent brings a new person into the world, he also transforms himself into a "new person." This is the purpose of the period of ritual impurity and the significance of the elevation and sin offerings the mother brings. The juxtaposition of this section with the laws of tzara'at, which is Divine punishment for significant sins, now makes sense. It is conveying the idea that a major cause of sin is faulty upbringing, which stems from the egotistic motives or shallow values of parents.

Sincere people are always asking, "How can we become better parents?" The best advice I can give is to become better people. The more one studies, gains wisdom, perfects his emotions, and increases his honesty, compassion, and sensitivity, the better a person he becomes. He is then a source of light for himself and all whom he encounters, especially his children. The best parent is a truly righteous person.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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