



Parsha Perspectives RABBI YOAV DRUYAN

וכל כלי חרש אשר ייפול מהם אל תוכו כול אשר בתוכו יטמא

“And concerning the earthenware vessels, if something (impure) falls into it, the entire contents are rendered impure.” (Leviticus 11:33)

Conventional wisdom has it that “you are what you eat.” Logic would also seem to dictate that to get better performance out you have to be acutely aware of what you put in. While we may not understand why kosher food is better for our spiritual nourishment, we can certainly fathom that food is important; after all, we do eat every day, usually several times a day. We can also easily understand that the numerous guidelines concerning what we consume are meant to lead us in a certain direction.

The latter half of Parshas Shemini deals with foods that are kosher. The Torah also lists guidelines for which foods can become impure (in a spiritual sense). The sages (Chulin 24b) present a perplexing case concerning these laws. Two food containers, a metallic one and a ceramic one, both come into external contact with an impure item (such as the carcass of a non-kosher animal). The metallic vessel becomes impure while the ceramic vessel remains pure. Why should identical contact produce diametrically opposite results?

The Kotzker Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern) explains that it is because of the nature of the utensils themselves. Metal utensils are items of value; as such, when they come into contact with impurity they contract it and pass it on to the food inside. Earthenware vessels, on the other hand, are simple utensils and are only valued

for the protection they provide to their contents. Since the outside of a ceramic utensil is merely a shell for its essence (what it holds inside), it cannot become impure by external contact.

However, if an impure item falls *inside* an earthenware vessel, then not only does the food become impure, it also transfers that impurity to the vessel as well. In the same case, however, a metal vessel would not necessarily transfer its impurity to the entire vessel.

Man (*adam*) was made of earth (*adamah*) and returns to the earth. He is, says the Kotzker Rebbe, essentially an earthenware vessel. Our bodies are only as valuable as what we contain. On one level, this does mean that “you are what you eat,” and the laws of *kashrus* help keep us spiritually healthy. On a deeper level, we contain far more than just food; our actions, our beliefs — these are what define us. When we

actively seek to fill ourselves with proper nourishment, we make our bodies into worthwhile vessels. With the right “fuel,” we can begin the task of performing worthwhile deeds that give the vessel — our bodies — its value.

Just as we are routinely careful with what we put into our bodies, we can also scrutinize our actions and beliefs with the same care.

Rabbi Druyan can be reached at parsha@partnersintorah.org

WORD of the WEEK מקוה

“However a spring, a pit, and a *מקוה* — *mikveh* of water, shall be pure” (Leviticus 11:36). The word *מקוה* is translated by Onkelos and Rav David Kimchi as a “collection” of water. In Genesis (1:10) the verse states, “And to the *מקוה* — collection of waters, He called the oceans.” We also find the word as a verb in Jeremiah (3:17): “And then Jerusalem will be called the throne of G-d, and all the nations will be gathered — וקונו — to it.” From Mishnaic times the word has been used as the name for a ritual bath that has been specifically constructed for purification according to Jewish law, as in “going to the *mikveh*.” Although the term is not often used today, the English term for a *mikveh* is a “ritualarium.”

Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

The lives of Nadav and Avihu, two sons of Aaron, were cut short by G-d for some highly objectionable activity in the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*). Rashi offers two insights into their offense: 1) they innovated a Tabernacle service without first consulting with Moses and 2) they entered the tabernacle in a drunken state. Shortly thereafter, G-d instructed Aaron and his descendants not to drink alcoholic beverages before serving in the Tabernacle or rendering a decision on Jewish law (Leviticus 10:8-9).

נ) The lesson about not drinking alcohol before serving in the Tabernacle seems appropriate if that was their offense. But if they were sober, and their offense was that they decided on Jewish law without consulting with Moses, why would the lesson conveyed to Aaron at this time concern rendering decisions on Jewish law while under the influence of alcohol instead of concerning the need to consult with one's elder teacher before deciding on Jewish law?

ב) Jewish law states that a person who drinks only four ounces of wine — half a cup — may not serve in the Tabernacle or render a ruling. But such a small amount of wine is generally not enough to impair someone's judgment. Why, then, might this be forbidden?

HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT

Kashrut has contributed very significantly to our survival as a distinct nation. Jews all over the world have common dietary patterns. I can be confident that the curried hamin of the Calcutta Jews has no milk and meat mixed together in its ingredients. When I eat kosher French cuisine I know that the meat is not pork and that the animals have been slaughtered according to Jewish law. Jews meet each other at the local kosher bakery; they shop at the same grocery and patronize kosher butchers and restaurants. These laws are a major force in maintaining Jewish unity and act as a social barrier against assimilation by creating a feeling of community among the Jewish people. This effect of the dietary laws, is, in fact, alluded to in the Torah portion this week: "You shall distinguish between the clean animal and the unclean and between the clean bird and the unclean... You shall be holy for Me, for I, G-d, am Holy; and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine" (Leviticus 20:25-26). These verses suggest that there is a link between observing the laws of kashrus and maintaining our identity as a distinct, unique people among the nations of the world (Or Hachaim, ad loc.).

A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

The *parsha* this week gives signs of *kashrus* for animals (cloven hooves, chewing cud) and for sea creatures (fins and scales). However, no signs of *kashrus* are given for birds. Instead, the Torah gives a list of non-kosher birds, and the sages deduced signs that indicate that a bird is not kosher from the Torah's list (*Mishnah, Chullin 59a*). The custom of the European Jewish communities is not to rely upon these signs regarding birds and to eat only those birds for which there exists a tradition that they are kosher (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 82:3*). When the North American turkey was first imported to Europe and Israel, the question arose as whether it was kosher. The Sephardic communities, relying on the absence of non-kosher signs, the presence of indications of kashrus, and on the bird's similarity to kosher fowl, permitted the consumption of turkey. However, the matter was controversial amongst the Ashkenazim, and many rabbis at the time were asked about turkey (*Darchei Teshuvah 82:26*). The majority maintained that turkey is a kosher bird, and the overwhelming majority of Ashkenazi Jews indeed consume turkey (*Responsa Shoel Umeishiv 5:1:69*).



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