

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

LEVITICUS 11-15

CHAPTER 11 - Clean & Unclean Foods

The Torah is a call to holiness - a call to abundant life – and the core theme of Leviticus is: ‘How can a sinful man draw near to a Holy God?’ One of the main duties of the priests was to teach the people the difference between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean (Lev. 10:10). The Law of Clean and Unclean, was apparently known long before Moses. In Genesis 4:20 God told Noah to take unclean animals onto the ark by twos, but clean animals by sevens. After the Flood, Noah built an altar and sacrificed of every clean animal and clean fowl. By this we learn that Noah already knew which animals were clean and which were unclean, and he also knew that sacrifices to God must only be with clean animals. Although, it was only after the Flood that God said: *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.* (Gen 9:3) But did ‘everything’ mean that all animals (and plants for that matter), were good for food?

Why did God change His mind? Why did the Flood make a difference? Did God divide living creatures into two categories in the first place—those good for human food, and those unfit for human food?

To this day, even non-practising Jews tend to maintain a kosher diet to some degree, whilst Christians have, for the most part, deemed these laws totally irrelevant, citing numerous NT Scriptures to confirm their stance. So let’s look at these laws more closely.

The living creatures deemed unclean basically fall into all four categories: animals, birds, water creatures, and insect life.

Animals: *Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat.* In delineating between clean & unclean animals, note that the kosher sign in each category is given first rather than simply pointing out the sign it lacks. This gave rise to a Yiddish idiom of ‘pig’s foot’ (which is cloven) to describe a hypocrite. A hypocrite will show off his ‘kosher’ attribute and hide his ‘non-kosher’ side.

Water creatures: *These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers—that you may eat... Whatever does not have fins and scales... they are an abomination to you.*

Birds: There is a long list of birds that may not be eaten, starting with the eagle, the vulture and the buzzard, and finishing with the bat.

Insects: *Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on all fours: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth... ‘ (these include locusts, crickets and grasshoppers.) And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth shall be an abomination.*

The Hebrew word translated “abomination” is repeated eight times in this chapter. It is a very strong word, meaning to “utterly detest”. When reading the laws pertaining to clean and unclean, we can clearly see that basic hygiene rules also come into play. For example, touching a carcass renders one unclean. The food our body consumes keeps us in health or exposes us to sickness. It is useful to consider what the unclean animals eat, how they eat, and how they process their food. For example:

pigs will eat almost anything. Their food is absorbed straight into their flesh, opposed to clean animals with multiple stomachs, which chew the cud. Many of the unclean birds eat carrion; unclean water creatures would include shellfish, which are bottom scavengers and can carry toxins. They break down dead and decaying matter in the ocean. Food poisoning is far more commonly caused by shellfish and pork than other meats or fish

Spiritual principles could also be applied to those declared unclean. For example, pigs are gluttonous, vultures etc. eat rotting flesh, owls and bats are creatures of the night, others crawl on their belly, creep on the earth, or feed off the bottom of the ocean.

Q. How and what do we feed our souls to maintain spiritual health?

Jewish commentary gives us these thoughts:

By observing these laws the Jew ascends the ladder of holiness. By ignoring them, he gradually builds a barrier that blocks out his comprehension of holiness. It is the spiritual mission of the Jewish people to attach themselves to the ultimate source of spiritual life. Consequently Jews must refrain from consuming foods that the Divine Intelligence knows to be an obstacle to the attainment of this lofty goal. The harm caused by these foods is not physical; rather they impede the heart from attaining the higher values of the soul. Painkillers dull the nerves and forbidden foods dull the spiritual antennae.

Q. Why might these be the first laws given to the new Priesthood?

The consecration of the Sanctuary and the appearance of the Divine Presence among the people begins to re-establish the ideal state that existed at the beginning of creation This too is a new beginning (recall the previous study and the eighth day), and just as God's first directive to mankind was "Do not eat...", so the first law destined to inaugurate the new relationship with God, again refers to food—"Do not eat..."¹ With this in mind, it is interesting to recall that the New Covenant mandate is to "eat my flesh and drink my blood". (Discuss)

Chapter 11 ends: *For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.'*"

Q. Does the New Testament have anything to say about clean/unclean foods?

You may be surprised to know that the subject of eating clean/unclean animals is actually NOT addressed in the New Testament. It comes down to *eisegesis* – reading one's own ideas into Scripture, versus *exegesis* – drawing meaning out of Scripture by seeking understanding through context and background. Central to a Hebraic perspective is the question, "What did this mean in the cultural setting in which it was spoken?" We need to ask the questions:

1. What was the context of the discussion?
2. How would the original hearers have understood it?
3. Are our conclusions in keeping with Jesus' own teaching?

Typical scriptures commonly seen to apply to this subject are: Mk.7:14-22/Mt.15:1-20; Acts 10; Col. 2:16; Rom. 14. (We look at Mark 7 at the end of this study). I encourage you to examine these scriptures for yourself – applying the principles above.

¹ Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of Torah*, p. 99.

We might find Isaiah's end-time prophecy gives us pause for thought:

Those (idolators) and those who eat the flesh of the swine, the abominable creature, and the mouse, will all be consumed together – says the LORD. (Isaiah 66:17)

1 Cor. 10:31: *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

CHAPTER 12 — Childbirth and Purification

Leviticus 12 continues the theme of separation between the holy and the profane—'ritually clean' (*tahor*) and ritually unclean (*tamei*)—now focussing on childbirth. We should note that becoming ritually unclean, had nothing to do with any known sin. *Tamei* does not mean impure or defiled, but is a technical term meaning to be in a condition that prevents one from entering the Tabernacle or Temple. *Tahor* means the opposite – that he/she may enter. "The sacred space where God dwelt was set aside for consciousness of eternity and spirituality. Birth, suffering and death, which belong to the physical realm, must be excluded from the Sanctuary—the presence of eternity."² (Discuss)

Nevertheless, after the requisite period of purification the woman was required to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering to the Priest – *and he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood.* No reason is given as to why the period of purification is double that for a female child than for a male child— forty days for a son; 80 days for a daughter.

In bringing a new life into the world, "man and woman become partners with God, who gives a soul to their offspring", says the Chumash. "These offerings and rituals inaugurate the beginning of the privilege of raising a newborn child in a life of dedication and holiness, which fulfils the purpose of Creation."

Mary faithfully observed this Law – Luke 22:22-24 *Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

CHAPTER 13-14 – Laws Concerning Tzara'at

Chapter 13 discusses, in great detail, the laws concerning one affected by a skin disease called Tzara'at— commonly translated as 'leprosy'. The first point we need to make is that the afflictions discussed here are not what we now call leprosy. The Hebrew meaning of *Tzara'at* is to be diseased, scourged. The detailed descriptions listed actually better fit symptoms of Melanoma. But we also see that wool, linen or leather garments, or even walls of a house³, could also be contaminated – presumably by mould.

After examination by a priest over seven day periods, if the affliction had spread, the person was declared unclean and was subject to dwelling 'outside the camp' until he was completely healed. The afflicted person was completely isolated and ostracized. He had to tear his clothes, like a mourner (13:45), remain alone, and cry out 'unclean, unclean'.

² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, p.183.

³ 13:47-59; 14:34-48

Q. Who was he mourning?

No medical treatment was administered, it seems because *tzara'at* was considered a punishment from God for sinful behaviour. The Jewish Talmud lists seven causes for *tzara'at*: murder, adultery, pride, theft, stinginess, a vain oath – but that most closely associated with *Tzara'at* is *lashon hara*—slandering speech, which affects social cohesiveness.⁴ Malicious gossip sows suspicion and dissension, damages relationships, undermines respect and trust on which families and communities depend. Nothing could do more to damage the kind of nation God was trying to build.

We saw in a previous study that there was no sacrifice for intentional sin, but rather the need for true repentance and change of attitude. “It is fundamental to the mindset of the Jewish priest, that there is a moral law at work in the universe just as there are physical, scientific laws. In the long run, sins do not go unpunished... those who sin in private will eventually be exposed in public.”⁵ It was believed that *tzara'at* exposed the consequences of hidden, unconfessed sin—his very skin is testifying against him. It was as if God were saying: if you sin in private it will come to the surface. As Moses says in Numbers 32:23 “...be sure your sin will find you out.”

1 Cor 11:31 *For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*

The effect of removing the afflicted person from the Israelite camp would give him opportunity to grieve & repent the sin that brought about the condition, mend his ways and be healed. He was to dress and conduct himself as a mourner. It was believed that these afflictions could be only healed by God. Since *tzara'at* renders one ritually impure, the Torah next describes the process by which the afflicted becomes purified, which was a three-stage process.

First, the priest must determine that the physical manifestations of the affliction are gone (indicating true repentance). The priest then slaughters a clean bird in an earthen vessel over running (lit. “living”) water. He then takes a second clean bird, cedar wood, a crimson thread and a sprig of hyssop and dips them in the blood of the first bird, sprinkling it seven times on the one to be cleansed, and pronouncing him clean. The living bird is then let loose in the open field. Whilst we might see this as a bizarre and complex ritual, it is not hard to see elements of the atoning death of Jesus here—every element ultimately points to the cleansing of our sin when we come to him in repentance—when we are transformed from **death to life**.

The earthen vessel speaks of the Earth; living water is directly tied to the Word of God; the two birds speak of the death of Jesus and His resurrection life; the wood points to the wood of the Cross on which Jesus died; the scarlet thread, His shed blood; Hyssop is mentioned in John 19:29, when Jesus is given vinegar on a sponge to slake his thirst. It was first mentioned in Exodus 12:22, in connection with the institution of the Passover; and in Psalm 51:7 *Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow.*

The person must then immerse his clothing in water, shave his head then immerse himself. He may then return to the camp, but cannot enter his own dwelling. The next stage takes place seven days later. Again the person shaves all his hair, immerses himself and his clothing. (We should notice the prevalence of the number seven in verses 7-10.)

The final step, on the eighth day—which we have seen points to new beginning—involves offering two unblemished lambs and an unblemished ewe, flour and oil. These serve as trespass, sin, burnt and meal offerings which provide atonement for the former ‘leper’. Both blood and oil are placed on

⁴ *The Light of the Torah.*

⁵ Sacks, *ibid*, p.193.

the right ear, thumb and big toe, and the remaining oil on the head, as we saw previously with the priests—the oil pointing to the Holy Spirit.

Q. Why do you think the purification process for tzara'at is so complex and so costly?

The essence of ritual purity involved issues of LIFE and DEATH. The theme of life and death was illustrated first in Genesis. God said: "in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." When Adam & Eve sinned they died spiritually and were banished from the Garden. Separation from the LORD and from the Tree of Life meant (spiritual) death.

John 11:25 Jesus says, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, **though he were dead, yet shall he live:** and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

What can we learn about Tzara'at from other scriptures?

Numbers 12:1-15 – Miriam became leprous when she spoke against Moses— the LORD'S anointed. Aaron interceded for her saying, 'let her not be like a corpse.' She was shut out of the camp for seven days. Deuteronomy 24:8-9 also refers to this:

"Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do. Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!"

11 Chronicles 26 – King Uzziah became leprous when, through pride, he usurped the office of priest and tried to burn incense. He became angry with the priests because they forbade him, and he became leprous until the day he died.

II Kings 5 - the healing of Naaman the Leper (from Syria). There are many lessons to be learned from this story, not least at the end, when Elisha's servant was afflicted with Naaman's leprosy because he defied Elisha and also lied to him.

Q. Can you see the common thread in each of these stories?

CHAPTER 15 – The Law concerning Bodily Discharges

The final chapter in this "clean/unclean" section focuses on bodily discharges. Discharges include semen and menstrual blood. As with the childbirth laws, we see here that, although no sin is apparent, a sin offering and a burnt offering is required to make atonement for the person before the Lord (15:15, 29)—again on the eighth day!

This law is touched on in two New Testament scriptures. We would all be aware of the woman with the issue of blood twelve years, who touched the hem of Jesus' garment (Mk. 5:25-34). Her condition is specified in Lev.15:25 *If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days... all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity.*

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction"—there is no mention of sin or a need to go to a priest with sacrifices.

Another, less recognized reference is found in Mark 7. I recommend you pause to read through Mark 7:1-23 in order to fully understand the context of this encounter.

In verse 15, Jesus says, *“There is nothing that enters a man from the outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.”* He says this in response being accused by the Pharisees and scribes of eating bread “with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands” (Mk. 7:2). Verse 19, *“Thus he declared all foods clean”*, often seen in brackets,⁶ has commonly been seen as Jesus declaring that all foods (including non-kosher food), are now ‘clean’ and fit to eat. That would not have been possible, as He Himself said: *... till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled.* The subject of this discussion is the accusation of eating food with ritually unwashed hands, which the Pharisees apparently consider to defiling.

Jesus’ response here is clearly alluding to the Levitical laws we have been studying, which the Pharisees would know well—it is what comes out of a man that defiles him. Jesus completes His statement, saying: “If anyone has ears, let him hear!”

Q. What are they meant to “hear”?

We can certainly relate this to the law concerning bodily discharges, but we can also go even relate it to our previous chapter—the encroaching (spiritual) death brought on by tzara’at, which is also seen as an affliction coming from the inside of man. In fact, the list of which Jesus cites as defiling a man in Mark 7:21-23—evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness—certainly line up with those the Jewish elders have associated with this disease, as we saw previously: Murder, adultery, pride, theft, stinginess, a vain oath, and evil speech.”

We will finish today with the following prayer originated by the 19th century Rabbi, Israel Kagan:

Gracious and merciful God, help me to restrain myself from speaking or listening to derogatory, demeaning or hostile speech. I will try not to engage in Lashon ha-ra, either about individuals or about an entire group of people. I will strive not to say anything that contains falsehood, insincere flattery or elements of needless dispute, anger, arrogance, oppression or embarrassment to others. Grant me the strength to say nothing unnecessary, so that all my actions and speech cultivate a love for your creatures and for You. AMEN

⁶ Brackets show that it is not present in all ancient manuscripts, and may have been inserted by the scribes at a later date to bring the text in line with their theological views.