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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

“Who Created God?”

“Whatever has a split hoof, which is completely separated into double hooves, and that brings up the cud—such you may eat.” (11:3)

Science is built on cause and effect. Every phenomenon must have a prior cause. Trace anything back far enough, and you arrive at its origin. But when we reach the origin of the universe itself, the question becomes unavoidable:

What caused it?

The discovery that the universe is expanding shattered the old idea of an eternal steady-state cosmos. If the universe is expanding, it must have begun. And if it began, it must have a cause. Scientists like Robert Jastrow admitted that this conclusion leaves science standing at a kind of intellectual precipice—compelled to accept a beginning, yet uneasy with what that implies.

Let’s be honest. This is not only a problem for science. It is equally a challenge for the believer.

If your faith is based on ‘because I believe...,’ it is vulnerable to intellectual challenge – like ‘Who created God?’ If everything has a cause, then what caused the First Cause?

But Belief is not a leap in the dark. Belief is not at loggerheads with Intellect, or Science; it is a natural and inescapable continuum.

The Rambam, at the very opening of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, writes: “The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a First Existence.” Not to believe—to know.

What does it mean to know that there is a First Existence?

It requires a shift in how we think about existence itself.

There are things that come into being—physical entities bound by time and space. These must have causes. But there are also things that do not come into being.

Like two plus two equals four.

Mathematical realities do not begin. Two plus two did not suddenly become four at some specific moment in time.

It is a truth that simply is. It neither starts nor ends.

The Chazon Ish explains that this distinction is the key. The error lies in assuming that everything is like a physical object—something that must be brought into existence. But not all realities are like that.

Hashem is not a being within the system of cause and effect. He is not one more link in the chain. He is the ultimate Reality that does not begin, does not depend, and therefore does not require a cause.

“Whatever has a split hoof, which is completely separated into double hooves, and that brings up the cud—such you may eat.” (11:3)

The Reform movement’s excuse for cancelling Kashrut was to claim that it was just a primitive means of hygiene, now obsolete with the advent of super-duper refrigeration, modern conditions of sanitation, inspection....

But Kashrut was never presented in Torah as a health system. The Torah frames it as kedushah (holiness)

“You shall be holy...”

Holiness is something – like two and two equals four – that exists above time and place.

The Torah lists the signs of kosher animals—split hooves and chewing the cud. These are not ‘reasons’ why animals are kosher. The cow did not become kosher through any external force, or at any particular moment in time. It is kosher because that is what it is.

There is a fundamental difference between something that is defined externally and something whose reality is intrinsic.

Much of the world is like that—defined, shaped, and explained by external causes. But there are things whose existence is not imposed from outside. Their reality is inherent.

The laws of kashrus remind us that not everything is the product of a process. Some things are rooted in a deeper reality that simply is.

Emunah is not a retreat from intellect. It is its culmination.

To recognize that behind all that begins, there must be That which never began.

That existence itself points to Something that simply is.

And always was.

And always will be.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

On the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various *korbanot* (offerings) as commanded by Moshe. Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. Hashem allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by Hashem. A fire comes from before Hashem, consuming them and stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the *kohanim* regarding their behavior during the mourning period, and warns them that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually impure species. The Jewish People are commanded to be separate and holy — like Hashem.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Sheva Brachot (Part 7)

A husband and wife are one soul, separated only through their descent to this world. When they are married, they are reunited again.

Zohar HaKadosh

The fifth of the *Sheva Brachot* is: **Bring intense joy and exultation to the barren one through the ingathering of her children amidst her in gladness. Blessed are you, Hashem, Who gladdens Tzion through her children.**

Rashi (*Ketubot* 8a) clarifies that the “barren one” here refers to Yerushalayim. What is the connection between Yerushalayim and a wedding? Rashi explains that it is exactly at our most joyous moments that we must remember that Yerushalayim has not yet merited to return to its former glory. Just as King David so poignantly expresses (*Tehillim* 137:5-6), “If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget [its skill]. Let my tongue stick to my palate if I fail to remember you, if I fail to elevate Yerushalayim above my foremost joy.”

The Meiri adds that this blessing is recited now because the next blessing is the first one that mentions the *Chattan* and the *Kallah* directly; the prophet Yeshayah likens the joy of a newly married couple to the joy that will be Yerushalayim’s with the advent of the Messianic Era (62:5).

And that explains why the first two words of our blessing – “*sos tasis*” – are essentially the same. In *Lashon HaKodesh* when words are repeated one after the other it is always for emphasis. We say “*sos tasis*” because we are blessing both Yerushalayim *and* the *Chattan* and the *Kallah* that their joy and happiness be intense and never-ending.

Yerushalayim is such a fundamental dimension of our national identity that Rabbi Akiva told his wife that if he had the financial means to do so, he would buy her a “*Yerushalayim dedahava*” – an exquisite piece of jewelry made out of pure gold that depicted Yerushalayim (*Nedarim* 50a). In fact, the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 59a) relates that later on, after they became wealthy, that is exactly what Rabbi Akiva did.

In the words of the Malbim, “Even if I rejoice in material success, Yerushalayim will be more important to me.”

It seems a bit incongruous that, having described Yerushalayim as the “barren one”, our blessing then goes on to mention the “ingathering of her children”? The *Ba’alei HaMussar* explain, however, that the language used is teaching the *Chattan* and *Kallah* a fundamental lesson:

As we learned together, the previous blessing introduces the concept that Adam and Chavah were originally one entity; they were created “whole”. Only after Hashem separated them, however, were they able to bring children into the world. And whilst “wholeness” may seem an ideal, in this imperfect world that we inhabit, we are actually only able to create and to be productive when we invest great effort into reaching our goals.

Our blessing is imparting to the *Chattan* and *Kallah* that in order for them to grow and to build they need to work hard. The wholeness that they had before their souls were brought down into this world is not something that they automatically regain when they marry. Rather, it is something that they will spend the rest of their lives together working on. They need to learn how to communicate effectively about everything, especially about emotive subjects; and, on occasion, to be able to *not* come to an agreement and yet retain their mutual respect and love for each other, and to continue living in harmony.

Not like this *Chattan* who is having his final, pre-marriage discussion with his Rabbi:

“Marriage has ups and downs; be aware that there will undoubtedly be challenging times ahead, and the more emotionally prepared you are, the easier it will be to navigate the difficult moments,” the Rabbi said.

“Oh, *we* won’t have any of those together!” declared the *Chattan* with an enormous sense of self-confidence.

“Why not?” asked his Rabbi.

“Because my Kallah has an MSc, a masters in communications! And I have a masters in theater!”

“Why do you think that that means that you won’t disagree with each other?” asked his Rabbi.

“Because,” answered the *Chattan*, “my Kallah is an expert communicator and I am an expert at acting as if I am listening!”

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

NON-KOSHER ANIMALS

Mitzvos 73, 153-165, and 470-471; *Vayikra* Ch. 11.

Rambam observes that, as a general rule, whatever food the Torah forbids is not good for our health (*Moreh Nevuchim* vol. III §48). This is clear to see regarding the prohibitions against eating carcasses (*neveilos*) and terminally ill animals (*tereifos*), since these are commonly plagued with harmful microorganisms. With regard to pork, however, gentiles mock the Jewish people for abstaining from this seemingly healthy and tasty food (*Yoma* 67b). Hence, the Torah considers the prohibition against eating pork a *chok*, a decree with no readily apparent reason, which Hashem expects us to observe with unquestioning loyalty (*ibid.*). There are of course many reasons that are not readily apparent, such as the fact that the pig is a dirty and repulsive animal (*Moreh Nevuchim* *ibid.*). The pig is also symbolically repulsive, since it has the external kosher sign of split hooves but does not have the internal kosher sign of chewing its cud, and it thus represents the wicked nation of Edom, who mask inner depravity with a façade of righteousness (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:5).

Radvaz (§185) shares the view that consuming non-kosher food is unhealthy. He supports this view by pointing out that the Torah prohibits the consumption of creeping creatures such as worms and other insects. The fact that these creatures are naturally repulsive to people is a clear sign that they are not healthy, because the body naturally repels anything harmful. *Radvaz* observed many terrible illnesses among gentiles that he did not encounter among Jews, and he attributed this to the Jewish people's kosher diet.

Other commentators explain that non-kosher animals are unhealthy for the soul. The Sages similarly explain that consuming impure foods creates a blockage in the heart that hinders it from perceiving spiritual matters (see *Yoma* 39a). Following this view, *Ramban* explains that predatory birds are not kosher because cruelty is in their blood, and eating them instills cruelty within a person. We may add that the very commandment to refrain from eating such animals brings to our attention that Hashem finds aggression and cruelty unacceptable. Along these lines, *Rabbeinu Menachem HaBavli* suggests that having scales is a sign of kosher fish because it shows that they are preyed upon and require armor, which means that they are not predators (cited in *Otzar HaMidrashim, Taryag HaMitzvos*). According to this approach, presumably, non-kosher foods are primarily harmful to those who possess more refined and therefore more delicate souls.

Of the various non-kosher creatures, the Torah places the most emphasis on creeping creatures such as insects, repeating some of the prohibitions several times. In one place, the Torah adds, “for I am Hashem, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, and you shall be holy, for I am holy” (*Vayikra* 11:45). The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 61b) interprets this verse to mean that this Mitzvah alone to abstain from eating creeping creatures would have been enough to justify the entire Exodus, since they are so repulsive.

The verse cited by the Gemara says, “for I am Hashem, Who brought you *up* from Egypt” instead of the usual terminology “took you *out of* Egypt” to allude to the spiritual elevation that results from abstaining from eating such creatures.

It emerges that one of the main reasons for the prohibition against eating creeping creatures is that they are repulsive. We may tentatively suggest that this is another reason for the prohibitions against eating other non-kosher creatures. Even gentiles eat mostly kosher animals, such as cows, sheep, and chickens, and are repulsed by the thought of eating horses, donkeys, and crows. Although gentiles eat many animals we do not eat, kosher animals are generally considered the most suited for consumption.

Abarbanel links the distinction between kosher and non-kosher animals to their diets. Non-kosher animals consume the meat, bones, and blood of other animals, which endows them with a savage, hot-blooded nature. Since their food is not always common, their flesh is often gaunt and not nutritious. Kosher animals, on the other hand, are herbivores and possess a nature as calm and humble as the grass that they eat. Their food is available on the ground wherever they turn, and they therefore tend to be fat and nutritious. Kosher animals chew their cud because they are incapable of breaking apart bones with their teeth, and cannot even digest grass without first softening it in their stomachs. Their split hooves are a sign of their passivity, because all predators have closed hooves with claws, which they use to attack and rip apart their prey. *Abarbanel* concludes that this is a general rule that has exceptions, such as the swine and the camel. These animals possess bad character traits and an impure nature, as indicated by the fact that they do not have both kosher signs.

Q & A

Questions

1. What date was "*yom hashemini*"?
2. Which of Aharon's *korbanot* atoned for the Golden Calf?
3. What *korbanot* did Aharon offer for the Jewish People?
4. What was unique about the *chatat* offered during the induction of the *Mishkan*?
5. When did Aharon bless the people with the *birkat kohanim*?
6. Why did Moshe go into the *Ohel Mo'ed* with Aharon?
7. Why did Nadav and Avihu die?
8. Aharon quietly accepted his sons' death. What reward did he receive for this?
9. What prohibitions apply to a person who is intoxicated?
10. Name the three *chatat* goat offerings that were sacrificed on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.
11. Which he-goat *chatat* did Aharon burn completely and why?
12. Why did Moshe direct his harsh words at Aharon's sons?
13. Moshe was upset that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *chatat*. Why?
14. Why did G-d choose Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar as His messengers to tell the Jewish People the laws of *kashrut*?
15. What are the signs of a kosher land animal?
16. How many non-kosher animals display only *one* sign of *kashrut*? What are they?
17. If a fish sheds its fins and scales when out of the water, is it kosher?
18. Why is a stork called *chasida* in Hebrew?
19. The *chagav* is a kosher insect. Why don't we eat it?
20. What requirements must be met in order for water to maintain its status of purity?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 9:1 - First of *Nissan*.
2. 9:2 - The calf offered as a *korban chatat*.
3. 9:3,4 - A he-goat as a *chatat*, a calf and a lamb for an *olah*, an ox and a ram for *shelamim*, and a *mincha*.
4. 9:11 - It's the only example of a *chatat* offered on the courtyard *mizbe'ach* that was burned.
5. 9:22 - When he finished offering the *korbanot*, before descending from the *mizbe'ach*.
6. 9:23 - For one of two reasons: Either to teach Aharon about the service of the incense, or to pray for the *Shechina* to dwell with Israel.
7. 10:2 - Rashi offers two reasons: Either because they gave a halachic ruling in Moshe's presence, or because they entered the *Mishkan* after drinking intoxicating wine.
8. 10:3 - A portion of the Torah was given solely through Aharon.
9. 10:9-11 - He may not give a *halachic* ruling. Also, a *kohen* is forbidden to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed*, approach the *mizbe'ach*, or perform the *avoda*.
10. 10:16 - The goat offerings of the inauguration ceremony, of *Rosh Chodesh*, and of Nachshon ben Aminadav.
11. 10:16 - The *Rosh Chodesh chatat*: Either because it became *tamei*, or because the *kohanim* were forbidden to eat from it while in the state of *aninut* (mourning).
12. 10:16 - Out of respect for Aharon, Moshe directed his anger at his sons and not directly at Aharon.
13. 10:17 - Because only when the *kohanim* eat the *chatat* are the sins of the owners atoned.
14. 11:2 - Because they accepted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in silence.
15. 11:3 - An animal whose hooves are completely split and who chews its cud.
16. 11:4,5,6,7 - Four: Camel, *shafan*, hare, and pig.
17. 11:12 - Yes.
18. 11:19 - Because it acts with *chesed* (kindness) toward other storks.
19. 11:21 - We have lost the tradition and are not able to identify the kosher *chagav*.
20. 11:36 - It must be connected to the ground (i.e., a spring or a cistern).mean “anger,” “face,” “even/also,” “although,” and “baking,” in addition to the aforementioned meaning of “nose/nostril.”