

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS  
SHEMINI

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

# בשמיני

## CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL

When introducing the idea of kosher and non-kosher animals, the Torah uses the phrase, "These are the 'Chayos' that you may eat, from among all the 'Beheimos' that are on the earth."<sup>1</sup> In this sentence, the words 'Chaya' and 'Beheima' are both translated as 'animals,' which raises the question - why use the term *Chaya* at all? Without the word *Chaya*, the phrase would be translated as, "This is what you may eat from among all the animals that are on the earth." What does the word *Chaya* add?<sup>2</sup>

*Rashi*<sup>3</sup>, quoting the *Medrash*<sup>4</sup>, explains that the term 'Chaya' can also be translated as 'living.' The Torah included this term as a hint to an idea behind the importance of eating kosher. How so?

We tend to think that food is a totally physical experience. We eat because our bodies need nourishment, without which we would die. However, the reality is that the food we eat affects us in a profoundly spiritual way as well. Hashem, Who created humans and animals, down to the smallest physical and spiritual components, is aware of the deleterious effect that ingesting non-kosher animals has on us. It deadens our *Neshamah*, stunting our capacity for spiritual growth.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the word 'Chaya,' 'living,' is a reference to our eternal living soul, which will bear the spiritual effects of our food choices. The verse can be read, "This is the way you will live eternally..."

The *Mesillas Yesharim*<sup>6</sup> explains that this concept applies to all areas of *Kashrus*; i.e. a milk and meat mixture, kosher animals that were not slaughtered properly, etc. He points out that while any forbidden matter can have this numbing effect on our soul, there is a stronger impact when dealing with something that goes into our bodies and becomes part of us.

This idea turns keeping kosher into such a privilege! When we are careful with what we put into our mouths, we are adhering to a divine diet that animates us, keeps us in tune with our spiritual side, and allows us to strive for spiritual growth.

**However, the reality is that the food we eat affects us in a profoundly spiritual way as well.**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Many of us have grown up keeping kosher, and don't have a problem being aware of what we eat. Or so we think...

The *Mesillas Yesharim* wasn't written for people who don't keep kosher, yet he speaks about the difficulties of making sure that everything we eat maintains the standards that Hashem has set for us.

Nevertheless, we can be faced with food related challenges, and not even realize it.

I want to have a dairy snack, but did I really wait the requisite amount of time after eating meat?

This candy has a kosher symbol on it, but I don't recognize it, can I just assume that it's ok?

This being true, how do we grow in our sensitivity to what we put into our mouths?

Built into our meals is a great way to remember that we are eating a divine diet. Every time we sit down to eat, we make a *Bracha*. By making the *Bracha* slowly and with concentration, it reminds us that we aren't 'just eating,' we're using this as a means to come closer to Hashem.

By doing so, we'll be more aware of which foods we choose to ingest.

1 Vayikra 11:2

2 *ibid.* Sifsei Chachamim note 'מ' and 'ס'

3 *ibid.* s.v. זאת החיה

4 Vayikra Rabbah 13:2

5 Eitz Yosef *ibid.* s.v. זאת החיה

6 Chap 11, based on *Toras Kohanim Shemini* 12:7

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## LIFE SAVING ADVICE

Simcha and Rivka Bamberger\* were mortified. There they were, sitting in a non-kosher chic restaurant surrounded by clients of Simcha's firm. The spot was chosen because the clients were not Jewish, and this was the best place in town. The Bambergers kept kosher, and had asked in advance that the restaurant provide kosher meals from another eatery. The food would be wrapped in a tamper proof container to ensure that the meal was indeed from the other restaurant - all of which led to the current embarrassing situation.

After having served all the other attendees, the waiters then rolled out a cart, piled with plastic trays, each encased in impenetrable plastic wrap. While the other guests politely ate their meals, Simcha and Rivka loudly removed the coverings from the trays, adding to the quickly growing pile of plastic wrap at their edge of the table. The sounds of ripping plastic and torn styrofoam echoed in the room, against the backdrop of silence from the other end of the table. Though nobody said anything, the Bambergers wished they could simply disappear. The rest of the meal proceeded uneventfully, but the Bambergers could not keep their mind on the conversation, as they kept thinking about what everyone else was thinking about them.

Time passed since that day, and the story has become a favourite one to share. The humour of the situation was evident, when looked at from afar. When asked, Mrs. Bamberger reflected, "The truth is, having gone through that experience, it'd be much easier to do it again. At the end of the day, everyone was polite, and our fears of their thoughts were really just in our head. It's funny, when you're in the situation, it feels like everyone is staring at you, but later you realize that they just took it in stride. In fact, I'd apply it to other situations - instead of focusing on what you fear others are thinking, think about the positive in our commitment to coming closer to Hashem."

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

**It's funny, when you're in the situation, it feels like everyone is staring at you, but later you realize that they just took it in stride.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Because of our natural desire for food, the *Mesillas Yesharim* states that the third most difficult area of *Halacha* is making sure that everything we eat is perfectly kosher.<sup>1</sup>
- *Tzadikim* have special protection from accidentally eating forbidden food, more than any other *Aveirah*, because it's a bigger disgrace to have ingested something not kosher.<sup>2</sup>
- Even food that is only forbidden *M'Derabanan* can have detrimental effects on a person's soul.<sup>3</sup>
- Hashem specifically chose a dietary prohibition as the first *Mitzvah* to Adam, as it would be the best way to help him recognize Hashem's mastery over all, including his own body.<sup>4</sup>

1 Chap. 11

2 *Tosfos Gitten 7a s.v. השתא בהמתן*

3 *Aruch HaShulchan* 81:34

4 *R' Hirsch on Chumash, Bereishis* 2:16