

Kosher: Beyond the Obviousⁱ

Parshah Shemini delineates for us, among other things, what God considers food/not food. This is an area where Messianic Jews are often misunderstood and even ridiculed. At first glance, all we see is a list of what can and cannot be eaten, but there's more to it than that. Here are the basics of the clean and unclean animals.

There are five animal groups listed: (1) animals, the land mammals, (2) fish, anything in the water, (3) birds, anything that flies besides an insect, (4) 'flying teeming creatures,' the swarming insects, and 'small creeping teeming creatures,' and finally (5) animals such as reptiles, rodents, and bugs. Each of these groups has its own rules governing what makes an animal in that group clean and unclean.

The required qualities for animals, the land mammals, are simple. They must be ruminants. In other words, they must have split hooves and chew their cud. While not listed here, *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 14 lists the clean animals: ox, sheep, goat, hart, deer, *yachmur*, *akko*, *dishon*, *teo*, and *zamer*. While the exact translations of some of the animal names have not been fully determined, the rabbis have matched the words to what they believe they are supposed to represent.

Ox	Any domesticated bovine
Sheep	Any ruminant of the genus <i>Ovis</i>
Goat	Hollow-horned ruminant of the genus <i>Capra</i>
Hart	Red Deer.
Deer	Any ruminant of the family <i>Cervidae</i> ; two large/two small hooves on each foot, males have antlers
<i>Yachmur</i>	Fallow deer; <i>Cervus dama</i> or <i>Dama dama</i> , yellow-brown fur with white spots, broad antlers
<i>Akko</i>	Ibex; <i>Capra ibex</i> , a group of wild goats
<i>Dishon</i>	Antelope; bovine with lighter build and horns pointed up and back
<i>Teo</i>	Wild ox; musk ox
<i>Zamer</i>	Giraffe; <i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>

In addition, there are certain animals that have only one of the two required characteristics. Four, in fact: camel, hyrax, hare, and pig. The camel chews its cud but does not have a split hoof. The hyrax, also called coney, dassie, pika, or rock badger, chews its cud but has no split hoof. And the hare, a group that includes the rabbits and anything in the family *Leporidae*, also chews its cud but has no split hoof. The pig, which includes domesticated pigs, wild boars, peccaries, and any kind of swine, have split hooves but do not chew their cud. It is interesting to note that, while most of the world was unexplored at this time, these four are the **only** animals in this group to have one of the two signs but not both. There have never been any others. This shows God's infallibility. He lists each and every possibly confused exception to the rule, and there are no others. God knew that more animals would be discovered over time, but he also knew that these four are the only ones to follow one rule and break the other. These four animals, though they meet one of the conditions for being kosher, are often considered **more** unclean than other animals. The reason for this is that the presence of one of the two signs shows only hypocrisy. The pig, especially, is the 'least kosher' of all the animals, because when it lies down, it displays its split hooves out in front of its body. In Yiddish, a hypocrite is called a *chazzer fissel*, or a pig's foot, following this idea.

For fish, the requirement is also simple. It must have fins and scales. This excludes crustaceans, shellfish, catfish, eels, sharks, whales, and dolphins. It's not a coincidence that bottom feeders (catfish, crustaceans) are excluded. Why would you want to eat something that itself lives on garbage and excrement? However, every single fish that has scales also has fins. Why, then, were both a requirement, if you really only need scales to define a kosher fish? The reason for this is a bit beyond the plainly obvious.

A student of Torah is often compared to a fish swimming in the water. The fins are the means to travel through the water, the intellect and the study skills. The scales are the fear of God, which shields and protects

the student from error or distortion of the Torah. This makes it a bit clearer. A fish with fins but no scales is like a student with plenty of motivation and talent, but no prudence and wisdom to keep them from error. This is a very dangerous type of student; as they flex their knowledge, yet corrupt that very knowledge in their minds because they lack the fear and wisdom to keep it pure. A fish with scales, on the other hand, represents a student who approaches the Torah with wisdom and awe of the author of the Torah. Such a student will find his fins, because approaching the Torah in the correct manner easily leads to a path to motivation and application.

Birds refer to anything that flies and is not an insect. The Torah lists twenty types of birds that are not kosher: *neshet*, *peres*, *ozniyah*, *daah*, *ayah*, *orev*, *bat yaanah*, *tachmas*, *shachaf*, *netz*, *kos*, *shalach*, *yanshuf*, *tinshemet*, *kaat*, *racham*, *chasideh*, *anafah*, *duchifat*, and *atalef*.

neshet	eagle, bald eagle
peres	bearded vulture, ossifrage (a bird of prey)
ozniyah	osprey, white-tailed eagle, mythological griffin
daah	kite
ayah	vulture family
orev	raven family
bat yaanah	ostrich
tachmas	owl
shachaf	gull
netz	sparrow hawk, or the entire hawk family
kos	owl, or falcon
shalach	pelican, heron, cormorant
yanshuf	great horned owl, or ibis
tinshemet	bat, owl, or swan
kaat	pelican
racham	magpie
chasideh	stork (Compassionate; why not kosher? It is compassionate to its fellows but will not help others)
anafah	heron
duchifat	hoopoe (a crested Old World nonpasserine bird (<i>Upupa epops</i> of the family Upupidae) having a slender decurved bill and barred black-and-white wings and tail)
atalef	bat

Sometimes included in the translation are the albatross, woodpecker, goshawk, long-eared owl, and capercaillie (a large grouse). Of note, some of the animals listed here include ‘according to its kind’ in the description. This means it includes those creatures that belong to the same group but may look different or have differing common names.

The ‘flying teeming creatures’ or swarming insects are largely unclean. There are only four exceptions to this: those insects with jointed ‘jumping legs’ that rise above their backs. The four specified insects are the ar-beh (locust), salam (grasshopper), chargol, and chagav. The last two are un-translated to this point, but are believed to be some kind of insect in the grasshopper family, such as crickets.

Not only are the -kinds- of animals eaten important, it is also important the way they are killed. For example, land animals must be killed by cutting both the esophagus and the windpipe both of the vital entrances. Fish, being of the water, do not need any special manner of killing. Birds, being partly of the land and partly of the water (for they were created along with the fish) need only one of the two vital passages cut. Any kosher animal killed improperly becomes un-kosher.

The *creeping teeming creatures* or small animals that crawl along the ground are definitely not for eating. There are eight that make people unclean until evening and make utensils unclean as if a dead body touches it.

choled	rat, mole, or weasel
achbar	mouse, possibly other rodents
tzav	toad or tortoise

anakah	hedgehog, porcupine, viper, or gecko
koach	monitor lizard
letaah	lizard
chomet	skink, chameleon, or snail
tinshemet	mole or chameleon (not to be confused with the unclean bird (bat, owl, or swan) of the same name)

Note that many of these are commonly thought to be disease-carrying vermin (rodents), or otherwise creatures that leave behind something when they pass (toad, snail). This is an important thing to note when we get into cleanliness of objects.

There are several ways to become unclean by means of an un-kosher animal. Touching the carcass of an unclean animal renders one unclean for the day. Carrying that carcass makes both the person and their clothes unclean. For the eight unclean creeping animals, however, their carcass carries more uncleanliness than most other animals. If the carcass of any of these eight animals touches any kind of tool or cloth, it must be washed and will be unclean until the evening.

Pottery is a special case. Anything outside an earthenware vessel cannot make it unclean, but anything unclean that goes inside the vessel, whether or not it actually touches it, makes it unclean. This is because earthenware is made as a vessel, to put things in. A tool's worth is in what it's made of, but a jar's worth is what is stored inside of it. Man is often compared to a piece of pottery. Jeremiah 18 compares God as the potter and us as the clay. Man was also made from the dust of the earth, and was filled with God's breath to live. Like pottery, man's worth is not in what he is made of, but rather what is inside of him. We have *Yeshua* inside of us!

ⁱ Message adapted from Dr. Lavi Zamstein's first message at Kol Simcha on March 29, 2003.