

Ambition and Integrity: Can the Two Co-Exist?

Deut., Ch. 14

4. These are the animals that you may eat: ox, lamb, and kid,
5. gazelle, deer, and antelope, ibex, chamois, bison, and giraffe.
6. And every animal that has a split hoof and has a hoof cloven into two hoof sections, [and] chews the cud among the animals that you may eat.
7. But you shall not eat of those that chew the cud, or of those that have the split hooves: the cloven one, the camel, the hyrax, and the hare, for they chew the cud, but do not have split hooves; they are unclean for you.
8. And the pig, because it has a split hoof, but does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You shall neither eat of their flesh nor touch their carcass.
9. These you may eat of all that are in the waters; all that have fins and scales, you may eat.
10. But whatever does not have fins and scales, you shall not eat; it is unclean for you.

These are the animals which you may eat... (14:4)

Nachmanides

The birds and many of the mammals forbidden by the Torah are predators, while the permitted animals are not. We are commanded not to eat those animals possessive of a cruel nature, so that we should not absorb these qualities into ourselves.

The Chassidic Masters

The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, taught that every created thing possesses a "spark" of divine energy that constitutes its essence and soul. When a person utilizes something toward a G-dly end, he brings to light this divine spark, manifesting and realizing the purpose for which it was created.

In all physical substances, a material "husk" (kelipah) encases and conceals the divine spark at its core, necessitating great effort on the part of man to access the spark without becoming enmeshed in the surface materiality.

No existence is devoid of a divine spark -- indeed, nothing can exist without the pinpoint of G-dliness that imbues it with being and purpose. But not every spark can be actualized. There are certain "impregnable" elements whose sparks are inaccessible to us. This is the deeper significance of the Hebrew terms *assur* and *mutar* employed by Torah law for the forbidden and the permissible. *Assur*, commonly translated as "forbidden," literally means "bound," implying that these are things whose sparks the Torah has deemed bound and imprisoned in a shell of negativity and proscription. *Mutar* ("permitted"), which literally means "unbound," is the term for those sparks which the Torah has empowered us to extricate from their mundane embodiment and actively involve in our positive endeavors.

The "bound" elements of creation also have a role in the realization of the divine purpose outlined by the Torah. But theirs is a "negative" role -- they exist so that we should achieve a conquest of self by resisting

פרק יד

ד. זאת הבהמה אשר תאכלו
 שור שיה כשבים ושה עזים: ה.
 איל וצבי ויחמור ואקו ודישן ותאו וזמר: ו. וכל
 בהמה מפרסת פרסה ושסעת שסע שתי פרסות
 מעלת גרה בבהמה אתה תאכלו: ז. אך את זה לא
 תאכלו ממצלי הגרה וממפריסי הפרסה השסועה
 את הגמל ואת הארנבת ואת השפן כי מעלה גרה
 המה ופרסה לא הפריסו טמאים הם לכם: ח. ואת
 החזיר כי מפריס פרסה הוא ולא גרה טמא הוא לכם
 מבשרם לא תאכלו ובגבלתם לא תגעו: ט. את זה
 תאכלו מכל אשר במקום כל אשר לו סנפיר וקשקשת
 תאכלו: י. וכל אשר אין לו סנפיר וקשקשת לא
 תאכלו טמא הוא לכם:



them and it is in their defeat and exclusion from our lives that their *raison d'être* is realized. A closed, unsplit hoof represents rigidity, being closed off and untouched by the plight of others. The split hoof, on the other hand, symbolizes approachability and sensitivity to others' suffering and needs. It also epitomizes a receptiveness to further growth. The kosher animal that chews its cud symbolizes a thoughtfulness and "chewing over" of teachings and circumstances.

These shall you eat of all that are in the waters: whatever has fins and scales you may eat (14:9)

Talmud, Niddah 51b

All fish that have scales also have fins (and are thus kosher). But there are fish that have fins but do not have scales, and are thus impure. If so, the Torah could have written only "scales," without having to also write "fins"? ... Said Rabbi Abahu, and so it was learned in the study house of Rabbi Yishmael: This is so that "Torah be increased and made great" (Isaiah 42:21).

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Scales represent the quality of integrity, which protects us from the many pitfalls that life presents. Integrity means that one has absolute standards of right and wrong and is committed to a morality that transcends one's moods and desires. Integrity preserves our souls from temptation.

Fins, the wing-like organs that propel fish forward, represent ambition. A healthy sense of ambition, knowing one's strengths and wanting to utilize them in full, gives a person the impetus to traverse the turbulent sea of life and to maximize his or her G-d-given potential. It propels us to fulfill our dreams and leave our unique imprint on the world.

The Talmud teaches that all fish that have scales also have fins, but that there are fish that have fins but no scales, and that such fish are not kosher

On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that all fish with scales have fins. While integrity is fundamental, ambition is also important. By mentioning fins as one of the signs of a kosher fish, the Torah teaches us that it is not enough to maintain our own integrity; we must also have a positive effect on the world. The lesson of the Talmud is that if we teach our children to approach life with awe before truth, with an unyielding commitment to serve a transcendent, moral G-d, they will certainly succeed and develop "fins" as well. Regardless of their other abilities, they will find the drive to improve themselves and to make the world a better place.

SUMMARY

- You are what you eat physically as well as spiritually. A person can assimilate the quality and character traits of what he ingests.
- Every creation possesses a spark of divine energy. We elevate some through using the energy derived from it for positive pursuits. We elevate others by rejecting them.
- Scales represent integrity; fins represent ambition. We need to have strong ambition to leave our mark on this world. But only if the ambition is accompanied by integrity are we assured against deception. If ambition is his only driving force, it leads to corruption.

