

Polar Bears in Sinai?

After discussing the detailed halachos about Korbanos in the first ten chapters of Sefer Vayikra, Perek 11 brings a change. There we start to learn the laws of which animals are allowed to be eaten.

In this perek, there are many ideas we can expound on, I'd like to highlight two particularly interesting ones.

In the early part of the Perek, Hashem instructs Moshe to tell the Bnei Yisrael, 'These are the creatures that you may eat from...' ^{1]} Rashi explains that Moshe physically showed each animal to clarify which ones he was talking about. The Gemara ^{2]} adds that Hashem showed every animal to Moshe. This raises questions: Were there animals like polar bears and penguins in the hot desert? What about the fish? How could Moshe access every type of animal there? And what exactly does it mean that Hashem showed each animal to Moshe?

Some suggest that the Torah only lists animals native to the Land of Israel or the desert. It's possible that some of these animals no longer exist or have since migrated to other places. ^{3]}

Let's explore this idea further, perhaps in a more mystical dimension. The Hafla'ah ^{4]} offers a fascinating suggestion. He suggests that, in reality, Hashem did not physically pick up the animals, nor did Moshe have access to every animal while in the desert. Rather, Hashem showed Moshe an image of each animal as a fiery shape. ^{5]} This is similar to how Hashem showed Moshe the half-shekel and the menorah, through images made of fire. The Haflaah further explains that this fire might symbolize the root essence of each animal's existence on Earth. This would imply that Moshe was not shown every individual species and subspecies, but rather the common ancestor of each animal group.

Why did Hashem need to show Moshe which foods were permissible and which weren't through fiery images? Does this place our food on the same level of significance as the Menorah and the Shekel? Furthermore, at the end of the perek, the Torah explains the reason for forbidding certain foods by saying, 'For I am Hashem who **raised** you up out of Mitzrayim.'

The Pasuk reads:

אֶל־תִּשְׁקָצוּ אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בְּכֹל־הַשְּׂרֵץ הַשְּׂרֵץ... כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדְשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי... כִּי אֲנִי ה' הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵהִיֵּת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי

'You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps... for I am Hashem your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy... for I the LORD am He who **raised you up** from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.' ^{6]}

Many mitzvos reference the Exodus from Egypt, often using the terminology 'I took you out from Mitzrayim.' Why, in the context of dietary laws, does the Torah switch to 'raising you up'? Why wasn't this term used when discussing the construction of the Mishkan, which seems to be a pinnacle of the redemption from Egypt? Why is it that this particular expression is used for the seemingly less significant laws about food?

1] Vayikra 11;2

2] Chullin 42a

3] Rabbi Natan Slifkin, The Torah Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom

4] Panim Yafos, Shemini

5] See also Menachos 29a

6] Vayikra 11;43-45

Polar Bears in Sinai?

Rashi also seems puzzled by this and refers us to Chazal^{7]}, who explain that Hashem is indicating that if the only reason He brought the children of Israel up from Mitzrayim was so they would not consume creepy crawlers like the rest of the nations, this alone would have been enough.

Let's explore this on a deeper level, as suggested by Rav Moti Elon.^{8]} He gives a captivating explanation: The Geula from Mitzrayim was meant to return us to the state of Adam HaRishon in Gan Eden before he ate from the Etz HaDaas. In Gan Eden, Adam had two primary responsibilities. First, he named all elements of creation, transforming them from mere physical matter into vessels for the Shechina. His second task was to eat with the directive that he should not consume from the Etz HaDaas. Much like the way the names he gave to creatures transformed and elevated them from mere matter, when Adam made a berachah over his food, he similarly transformed and elevated it from mundane to spiritual. Through this act, he reconnected the food to its spiritual source.

Eating is fundamentally about elevation. When we constructed the Mishkan, the Torah referenced Hashem taking us out of Mitzrayim. In contrast, when we're commanded not to eat impure animals, the Torah refers to Hashem elevating us from the impurities of Mitzrayim. This elevation aligns us fully with our spirituality.

The same concept applies to the half-shekel, revealed in fire, which symbolizes our elevation during the census of Bnei Yisrael.^{9]} Through taking part in being counted, we connected to our spiritual roots.^{10]} Similarly, the menorah embodies this idea of elevation, as the pasuk says **בַּהֲעֹלֹתָךְ אֶת־הַנֵּר**. Rashi notes that Aharon had to ensure the flames were rising upward - perhaps symbolizing the connection and elevation of earthly spirituality to its heavenly origins.

Whenever something spiritual manifests on Earth, it often appears as fire. For instance, at Har Sinai, Hashem descended in fire. In the burning bush, the Malach Hashem appeared in the flame. Fire, as seen earlier in the Parsha with Nadav and Avihu's death, is a form of spiritual matter.

Thus, elevating the mundane to a level of spirituality is not a process easily depicted on paper; it requires a spiritual component. It must be shown with fire, for fire is its very essence.

As Pesach and the Seder night approach, two mitzvos particularly stand out. The first is to recount the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim - our liberation and exodus from Egypt. The second is the act of eating. Rav Tzadok HaKohen teaches^{11]} that on this night, we are a little like Adam Harishon. By the seder, we don't just make a beracha on the food we eat; we make a beracha on the very act of eating itself. The beracha on Achilas Matza elevates all the times we've eaten bread throughout the year to its spiritual essence. Similarly, with the beracha on Maror, we elevate all the vegetables and plants we've consumed. Regarding the Pesach, we do not make a beracha on the actual food, as we cannot bring the Korban Pesach today. However, we pray that we will merit to eat from the Zvachim and the Pesachim in the future, thereby elevating everything we consume.

The Geula from Mitzrayim did not reach its ultimate realization with the building of the Mishkan, nor with the Korbanos on the Mizbeach, even though they were consumed by heavenly fire. At that time, we were still at the stage of being taken out of Mitzrayim. It was only when we received the commandments regarding the purity and impurity of what we eat that we truly attained a higher level of being **raised** up from Mitzrayim.

7] Bava Metzia 61

8] Techeiles Mordechai, Shemini

9] Rashi on Bava Basra 10b

10] Rav Moshe Dovid Vali, Ki Tisa

11] Es L'Echol, 10