

## Spotlight on... Animals

### Background:

The last two aliyot of parashat Shemini contain all of the laws about kosher and non-kosher animals. Though the rules are thorough, the Torah does not tell us WHY some animals are kosher and others are not. We will look at two rabbinic explanations for this. But first, review these two aliyot on your own (Vayikra Chapter 11.) What word does the Torah use to refer to kosher animals? What word refers to non-kosher animals? How might this inform how we think about the reasoning for having kosher and non-kosher animals?

Here are 2 rabbinic approaches (edited for clarity):

**Rashbam:** Following the plain meaning of Scripture it may be argued that all the animals which God forbade to the Israelites [were forbidden] because they are repulsive. They damage and heat up the body. That is why they are called impure. Outstanding physicians also concur with this explanation.

**Seforno:** After the incident of the Golden Calf, the Israelites lost a lot of their spiritual connection to God. Moshe's prayer was able to save part of it, but not all of it. God needed a new way to refine the character of the people in attitudes and by application of their intelligence so that they would qualify for eternal life (life after death of the body). The method chosen for this was the refinement of the foods eaten by the people. God forbade consumption of the kinds of foodstuffs which exert –over a period of time- a negative influence on the people's character and their intelligence.

### Questions:

1. According to the Rashbam, why did God give us the rules about non-kosher animals?
2. According to the Seforno, why did God give us the rules about non-kosher animals?
3. What is the difference between the Rashbam and Seforno's approaches? Which resonates more with you?
4. According to these explanations, could one argue that the best way to eat is to be vegetarian and avoid meat altogether? (Hint - the answer to this question is always yes!)

BONUS QUESTION! The colloquial term to refer to non-kosher meat is "treif." What does this word mean, and in what context related to meat does it appear in the Torah? *Email your answer to [MaharatRuth@ostns.org](mailto:MaharatRuth@ostns.org) to win a free Beyond Burger!*