

Parshat Shemini 5778

Shemini (Vayikra 11:14) relates for the first time (and again in Devarim 14 :13) the list of kosher and non kosher mammals fish and birds . The Torah enumerates 24 species of birds which are not kosher. One of these is called by 3 names: the 'raah' , the 'dayah' and the 'ayah' . Rashi explains (Chulin 63b) that these are all in fact the same bird . All names are specified because if a person knew the bird by only one or two of its names then they may have entertained the idea that it was permitted. Probably the most accurate English name for this bird is the Kite . Each Hebrew name reflects a property of this bird : 'Raah' stems from the verb 'to see' . ' Dayah' stems from the verb 'to fly, soar or glide ' and 'ayah' stems from the verb 'to wail , scream or cry '.

The sight of this bird is remarkably keen and piercing. From the vast elevation to which it soars, it is able to survey the land beneath and detect worms, insects or other birds that will become its food. They are highly skilled acrobatic fliers and they have a shrill whinnying call .

What is also incredible is that many hundreds of years before all this scientific research , the Talmud described this bird in just a few words (Chulin 63b)
אמר רב אבהו ראה זו איה

Rabbi Abahu said the Raah bird is the same as the Ayah
?ולמה נקרא שמה ראה

And why is it called Raah ?

נתיב לא ידעו עיט שרואה ביותר. וכן הוא אומר
ולא
'שזפתו עין איה

Because it has incredible eyesight . And thus he said '**there is a path which no bird of prey knows and which the Kite's eye has not seen ' (Iyov 28:7)** The fact that this verse stresses that even the Kite has not perceived the hidden path, indicates that the Kite would usually possess striking vision.

תנא עומדת בבבל ורואה נבלה בארץ ישראל , !

We have learnt that this bird stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the land of Israel ! As the distance between Babylon (present day Iraq) and Israel is some 500 miles this is beyond impressive ! The Maharal in his Sefer 'Be-er Hagolah' explains that the bird may

have extraordinary vision or alternatively when in its most perfect state it would have this ability but practically the physical bird is always flawed . This is based on the idea of Tzurah (the object in its abstract most perfect ideal form) and Chomer (its practical manifestation in a concrete and flawed universe). Why does the Talmud use such a strange illustration ? Further we are often instructed to abstain from animals which display negative character traits or a cruel nature so that these facets will not become imbued in our own characters ...the birds and many of the mammals forbidden by the Torah are predators while the permitted animals are notwhy then is this bird not kosher ? Surely keen eyesight and far sighted perception are desirable traits ?

But this is precisely what the Talmud is saying: ' This bird stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the land of Israel!' When you gaze at the land of Israel you could see many positive uplifting things, yet what does this bird see? Corpses! Being carnivorous its eyes see only one thing.....the carcasses that it wants to eat and devour.

Everyone has flaws, thus we need the Torah to guide us but the lesson of the Kite is saying to not focus on the flaws. Don't be like the Kite, only managing to observe the negative and zooming in on it. People who are pure and holy see innocence and purity in others. People in touch with their own soul, sense the soul in others. Extreme pride or insecurity can impair the ability to see real goodness in others. It doesn't mean being naive to reality but don't become a trait person spewing hate.

Abarbanel and others state that we do not know the absolute reasons for these mitzvos. They are prohibited because of their spiritually harmful effects, not physical, as Abarbanel refers to the nations around us who consume non kosher and incur no deleterious physical effects whatsoever.

We just experienced the Yom Tov of Pesach where we were reminded that one is not allowed to break a bone of the Korban Pesach .Tosfos says that we eat the Pesach when satiated so that we won't break bones..... we are not hungry . The Sefer haChinuch says that this is because a person is affected by what he does . We seek to be refined and not demeaned.

A Ben Melech (Prince) doesn't break bones. בניים אתם לה' אלוקים (Devarim 14:1) you are children to Hashem your G-d. May we indeed be worthy of the words we uttered in the Pesach Machzor just one week ago : אתה בחרתנו מכל העמיםורוממתנו מכל הלשונות :

Sources : Rabbi Y Y Jacobson , Rabbi A Schorr