

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Shemini**  
**April 2, 2016**

**פרשת שמיני**  
**כ"ג באדר ב' תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 9:1-11:47  
*Maftir* for *Parshat Parah: Bemidbar* (Numbers) 19:1-22

After the dedication of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and the ordination of the *cohanim* (priests), two of Aharon's sons bring a strange fire before God and are consumed by fire; God then instructs Moshe and Aharon regarding which animals, fish, and birds may be eaten by the Bnei Yisrael.

An interesting point appears in chapter 11, verse 44:

כִּי אֲנִי ה', אֶ-לֹהֵיכֶם, וְהִתְקַדְּשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים, כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי; וְלֹא  
תִטְמְאוּ אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם, בְּכֹל-הַשְּׂרָץ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ.

For I am Hashem your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy; neither shall you contaminate your soul with any manner of swarming thing that moves upon the earth.

Many of us are familiar with the mind-body connection: the idea that what one feels or thinks affects our physical state of well-being. This verse indicates that the converse is true also. What we ingest affects our emotional and cognitive states.

If we stop to think about it, we all know that this is true. For example, a widely-held theory maintains that too much sugar or too much of certain food additives will make children hyperactive. (I say "theory" because the cause-and-effect

relationships have not been proven, and many practitioners believe that it is bunk.) We know that drugs such as barbiturates or mood stabilizers have significant effects on how our minds function and on how our emotions and impulses manifest themselves.

“You are what you eat” is a truism that so many of us heard from our mothers and fathers. But what the Torah adds to the connection between our bodies and our minds is our souls. According to the verse cited above, what we ingest can have an effect on the purity of our souls. The Babylonian Talmud in Tractate *Chullin* 59a states explicitly that birds of prey and carnivorous mammals are *prima facie* non-kosher. A number of commentators believe that this is because they cruelly attack and devour other creatures, and were we to eat such foodstuffs, we too would develop the trait of wanting to attack and devour others (albeit figuratively).

Human beings exist on multiple simultaneous planes: the physical, the intellectual, the psychological, the emotional, and the spiritual. No matter how much we may desire, these planes cannot, and perhaps should not, be separated from one another. What we do in one sphere inevitably will affect all of the other spheres of our being.

Although this idea may echo “new age-ism”, it goes back as far as the Book of *Vayikra*.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Name three different ways in which your body and your mind affect each other.
- How do the five planes mentioned above interact with each other? Is there one that has more influence on you than others? If so, which one and why?
- Create an argument supporting a healthy diet based on the verse and discussion above.