

# **Dvar Torah** by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

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## **SH'MINI**

The last pasuk in Parshat Sh'mini gives us tremendous insights into one of the most common traditions in Judaism (Vayikra 11:47).

"To distinguish between the impure and the pure, between the animal which may be eaten and the animal which may not be eaten."

The Pasuk gives us the absolute reason behind why we are to keep kosher. Not for health reasons and neither for some historical basis. Rather, to distinguish between the pure and the impure, between the animal that can be eaten and the animal that cannot be eaten. That is the final statement in the Parsha. Kashrut is to teach us the importance of being able to distinguish between the acceptable and the non-acceptable. Rashi gives a very distinct and deep answer. Rashi comments that the Torah is requiring us to distinguish between an animal slaughtered correctly and an animal slaughtered incorrectly, which makes it off limits. What is the difference between the two? The answer is, just a hairline difference. If the cut by the Shochet is off by even a millimeter then it

becomes treif and no longer has the potential to become kosher. The Torah is teaching us an important lesson, the need to hone in with our ability to differ and discriminate between two things.

On this issue, I saw once, a Talmudic discussion that Rabbi Yishmael asked Rabbi Meir what was his profession. Upon answering that, he was a scribe writing Mezuzot and Tefillin, Rabbi Yishmael warned him to be careful in his job. Upon inquiry, he was told that "were you to leave out one letter or include one extra letter, you can destroy worlds." As an example, Rashi describes that if instead of writing HASHEM ELOKIM EMET, "G-d is Truth", and if the letter ALEF would be omitted from EMET, you would be left with the words HASHEM ELOKIM MEIT, "G-d is Dead." The difference of one letter can make such a change. Similarly, as we saw in the recent Chag of Pesach, a few simple minutes distinguish between leavened bread and between matzot.

Kashrut is not just a question of what is kosher and what is not kosher. The message seems to be that what we do is often the result of a sudden, impulsive and hairline decision. A thin line distinguishes not only between kosher and treif and chametz from matza but also from what is a kind gesture from a destructive one. We need to learn the power to distinguish

between the permitted and the forbidden, between right and wrong and between what is Kadosh and what is Chol. To us, we need to distinguish our time. How to spend an hour correctly or how to waste it. Similarly, how to choose our words, where one statement can resolve issues, and one can cause arguments.

