**How Much Meat to Eat?**

**A Jewish Approach to Eating Meat**

**Bavli Hullin 84a**

Our Rabbis taught: “When the Lord your God shall enlarge your border, as He has promised you, and you say: I will eat meat:” (Deuteronomy 12: 20). The Torah here teaches *derekh eretz*, that a person should not eat meat unless he has a special appetite for it.

I might think that this means that a person should buy [meat] in the market and eat it, the text therefore states: “Then you shall slaughter [animals] from your herd and from your flock.”

I might then think that this means that he should kill all his herd and eat and all his flock and eat, the text therefore states: “From your herd” and not all your herd; “From your flock” and not all your flock.

From here Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: A man who has a maneh should buy for his stew a liter of vegetables; if he has ten maneh he should buy for his stew a liter of fish; if he has fifty maneh[[1]](#footnote-1) he can buy for his stew a liter of meat; if he has a hundred maneh he may have a pot set on for him every day.

And [how often for] the others? From Sabbath eve to Sabbath eve.

Rav said: We must defer to the opinion of the Elder.

Rabbi Yohanan said: Abba comes from a healthy family, but as for us, whoever among us has a perutah in his purse should hasten with it to the shop-keeper.

Rav Nahman said: As for us, we borrow to eat [meat].

**Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger**

“We can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused.   
        Another set of precepts refines on this last point. Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation. It therefore involves correct definition, discrimination and order. ..

We have now laid a good basis for approaching the laws about clean and unclean meats. To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary roles merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines.”

1) “Cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing ungulates are the model of the proper kind of food for a pastoralist. If they must eat wild game, they can eat wild game that shares these distinctive characters and is therefore of the same general species.”

2) “In general the underlying principle of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class. Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world.”   
3) “To grasp this scheme we need to go back to Genesis and the creation. Here a three-fold classification unfolds, divided between the earth, the waters and the firmament. Leviticus takes up this scheme and allots to each element its proper kind of animal life. In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness.”

4) Creatures which walk on paws are unclean because these are hands, not feet.

5) “The last kind of unclean animal is that which creeps, crawls or swarms upon the earth…Whether we call it teeming, trailing, creeping, crawling or swarming, it is an indeterminate form of movement. Since the main animal categories are defined by their typical movement, `swarming' which is not a mode of propulsion proper to any particular element, cuts across the basic classification.”

6) “The case of the locusts is interesting and consistent. The test of whether it is a clean and therefore edible kind is how it moves on the earth. If it crawls it is unclean. If it hops it is clean (11:21).”

7) “If the proposed interpretation of the forbidden animals is correct, the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance, holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal.”

**Leon Kass, The Hungry Soul**

“The principles important to Genesis 1—place, form or kind, motion and life—are all at work in Leviticus 11.”

“Ruled out are:

1. Creatures that have no proper or unambiguous place; for example the amphibians.

2. Creatures that have no proper form. Either indefinite form (jellyfish), deceptive form (eel) or incomplete form (incompletely cloven-hoofed animals.

3. Creatures that violate proper locomotion, such as those animals that live in water but walk on land (lobsters); that that live on land but swarm as in water.

4. Creatures that violate the original dietary code, showing no respect for life—that is the carnivorous ones.

“Cud chewers are so far from eating other animals that they finally chew and swallow only the homogenized stuff they have already once swallowed and raised: When the pig, a notorious omnivore, is declared unclean, the Torah says it is because ‘he does not chew the chew’ presenting by implication, as it were, the ideal of the perfect fit of activity and object…One should chew not life but chew—that is, that which is fit for chewing. The chew-chewers are poles apart from that first accursed and most unclean animal, the belly-crawling serpent, which is in fact a moving digestive tract and which ‘voraciously’ swallows its prey whole and live.”

“The dietary laws should remind us not only of the created order but of the order as created, not only of the intelligible separations and forms but of the mysterious source of form, separation and intelligibility.”

“And how might one become holier through observing these separations? Two suggestions. On the one hand, through obedience. One reduces the distance between the holy and the profane by sanctifying the latter through obedience to the former. The low is made high—or at least higher—through acknowledgement of its dependence on the high; the high is “brought down,” “democratized,” and given concrete expression in the forms that govern ordinary life….

On the other hand, through imitation: God seems to say to the creature made in His image, “You should make distinctions because I make distinctions.”

1. This is a rather large sum of money. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)