

"You shall not eat any abomination....For you are a holy nation to Hashem, your G-d." (14:3,21)

The *Torah* has prohibited particular groups of animals from human consumption. If one studies the various commentaries, it is apparent that one of the aims of the dietary laws is to avoid transferring an animal's instincts to man via its consumption. Man was originally destined to be vegetarian. It was only after the *mabul*, flood, when his nature changed, that Hashem granted him permission to eat meat. Safeguards, however, were determined that would avoid inadvertently strengthening man's animalistic nature as a result of the consumption of meat. The general principle is that the closer an animal's nature and habits are to the vegetable world, the less likely it is to arouse the animalistic nature of a human being. The meat of animals who are unlikely to reinforce men's animalistic nature are permitted to be eaten.

In his explanation of the Jewish Dietary Laws, *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, emphasizes another point. The human body is to function as the vehicle for the *neshamah*, soul, to strive to reach its goals of holiness and moral freedom. Consequently, the more submissive the nature of the human being's body, the more likely it is to defer to the dominance of the demands of the soul. Every food which causes the body to be active in a prurient direction should be avoided, creating within man an indifference to the noble impulses of moral life. Hence, vegetable foods -- all of which are permissible -- are the most preferable of all foods, just as plants are the most passive substances.

From a purely religious point of view, the question is clear: How does food influence the mind and character? The answer is simple: Hashem, Who created both the body and soul of man, is obviously aware what is good or harmful for the soul of man. If the *Torah* states that certain foods have a harmful effect on the soul of man, then we, who have no knowledge of the real relationship between the body and soul, have no right to question this judgment. These laws are *chukim*, *mitzvos* presented without a clearly stated reason. We must, therefore, not permit our inability to comprehend the complexities of the law to influence our observance of them.

In the final analysis, in these as well as all laws of the *Torah*, the ultimate reason for the validity of the law is the simple fact that it is the Divine decree of the Almighty. Our own speculation, regardless of its accuracy, can never have the same value as the basic conviction that it is all a *tzivui* Hashem, command of Hashem, Who has ordained these laws for our own benefit. It is this *emunah peshutah*, simple/complete faith, which has molded the collective character of *Klal Yisrael*. The laws of *kashrus* have been a hallmark which has distinguished the Jew throughout the generations. They have refined his body and ennobled his soul. They have engendered within us a feeling of dignity and moral rectitude, enabling us to strive for the sublime and to place emphasis upon the eternal. By its adherence to these laws, *Klal Yisrael* achieves the distinction of being an *Am Kadosh*, Holy Nation.