

**But this is what you shall not eat... the camel (for it brings up its cud), but its hoof is not split ... and the hyrax, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split... and the hare, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split. It is unclean to you.
(11:4,5,6)**

The Torah teaches us that an animal achieves kosher status when it possesses two identifying signs/characteristics: split hooves; and chews/brings up its cud. We are taught that three animals, the camel, hyrax and hare, chew their cud, but, since they do not have split hooves, they are deemed unkosher. In his *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*, observes what appears to be an anomaly in recording the three circumstances of a lack of split hooves. In animal number one, the camel, the Torah writes, *uparsah einenah mafris*, which loosely translated means, it presently does not have split hooves. The next animal, the hyrax, is described by the Torah, *u'parsah lo yafris*, which means, it will not have split hooves. The last animal, the hare, is portrayed as, *u'parshah lo hifrisah*, it did not have split hooves – in the past tense. Why does the Torah vary its characterization of the unkosher aspect of the animal in three tenses? It could have just as well delineated the reason in one tense.

Rav Hershkowitz suggests a homiletic rendering of these *pesukim* which implies an inspirational lesson concerning how we should view and judge people. *Chazal* teach, *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*; “Judge every person favorably.” Give everyone the benefit of the doubt. A common variation of this maxim is, “Judge not a person until you have walked (a mile) in his shoes.” We never really understand a person until we consider things from his vantage point, from his point of view, based upon what he has experienced in life.

What is the meaning of *kol ha'adam* – every person, or all of the person? The accepted understanding of this phrase is, every person has a past; he lives in the present, and, with Hashem's blessing, he will have a future. When we are about to judge someone, do not judge him solely on his past actions or his present demeanor. Every person (hopefully) has a future. He might change. Circumstances in his life might be altered to the point that his future now appears bright and hopeful. Every person has a moment/period/stage in life in which he does not meritoriously judge the whole person – past, present and future. As the *Maharal* puts it: Only Hashem is able to judge the whole person. Only Hashem knows every person's good and bad deeds – and their motivations and provocations. Many people have seriously erred in life, made poor choices. These same people could really be good people who sadly became victims of others due to circumstances beyond their control, or fell in with the wrong people. Prior to judging them and writing them off (which is sadly so common), remember that we have a concept of *kol ha'adam*, all of the person. Hashem is the only One Who can judge any person in the context of his whole life, thus acknowledging the good and bad that comprise his life.

We now return to the three *pesukim* which present the lack of split hooves in three frames: past, present and future. The Torah is teaching us that before we render the *siman tumah*, sign of ritual impurity, we must be certain that it was impure, is impure and (for all intents and purposes, based upon what we see now), it will continue in its impurity, with no redeeming value. Only then does the Torah agree to refer to this creature as *tamei*.

I came across an interesting idea which will alert us to something which I think most (all) of us are guilty. A teacher conducted an experiment with his class. He held up a white paper plate in which he had placed a small black dot. He then asked the students to describe to him what they saw. The first student said he saw a black spot. Another student asserted it was a target for shooting practice. A third student said he simply saw a faulty or dirty plate. The teacher looked at the class and asked: "Did not anyone among you see a white plate?"

We have become attuned to looking at (picking out) the black spots. Essentially, this was a large, white plate with a tiny, black spot in the middle. We are so used to looking for the dirt, the negative, the imperfections, that we fail to see the large picture: the white plate. We do this to people at times, even to our own children. We ignore their successes and achievements and, instead, focus on the black dots. We are judgmental and critical, when we should be seeing the good in others. I might add that, veritably, it is impossible to ignore the black dot, but we must remember and reiterate in our minds that it is only one tiny black dot on a large white plate, and it is only because the plate/background is so white that we even notice the black dot.