

הלכה of the Week

~ בשרות (1) ~

Kashrut (1) ~ Permitted and Forbidden Foods

The תורה teaches us about which animals, fish and birds we may and may not eat in ויקרא 11 (Vayikra 11) and דברים 14 (Devarim 14).

- ✓ **Animals** are permitted only if they both,
 - a) have fully cloven (split) hooves, and
 - b) chew the cud
- × All others are forbidden. (see note 1, over page)

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- ✓ **Fish** must possess both **fins** and **scales** to be kosher.

All fish that have scales also have fins. However, many forbidden fish have fins but no scales. If you find scales on a fish you can be sure it is kosher. (see note 2)

The Torah refers to sea creatures that are forbidden to us as “שָׂרָץ הַמַּיִם,” “those that swarm in the water.” These include oysters, snails, crabs, shrimps, and so on.

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Among **birds**, no characteristics (signs) are provided in the Torah to help us see which are ✓ permitted or × forbidden. Instead, a list of non-kosher birds is given (almost identical lists in [ספר ויקרא] שמיני and [ספר דברים] ראיה). (see note 3)

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The תורה forbids every creature that “teems (or swarms) on the ground” and every one that “creeps on its belly.”

These include lizards, snakes, rodents (rats, mice), hedgehogs, snails and insects.

see notes over page 

פרקי אבות of the Week

פרק ד

כ"ז רבי מאיר אומר, אל תסתכל בקנקן, אלא במה שיש בו. יש קנקן חדש מלא ישן, וישן שאפלו חדש אין בו:

Rabbi Meir taught:

You should not look at the barrel, but at the wine that is in it.

A new barrel may be filled with old wine, and an old barrel may not have any wine in it at all.



note 1

✘ **The Torah specifically mentions some animals which fulfill either only a) or only b), above. For example, the camel and the hare bring up their cud but do not have split hooves, and the pig has split hooves but does not chew its cud.**

✓ **Animals that possess both a) and b) and are therefore כְּשָׁרִים are cattle, sheep, goats and deer.**

note 2

! It is important to remember that non-kosher fish are widely available and sold. If one does not have access to a kosher fishmonger one must be particularly careful when buying fish fillets (fish with the bones removed) or chopped / ground fish, because one can not see whether the fish had scales.

! Cans of fish may contain non-kosher fish whose flesh (and name) may be similar to kosher fish.

note 3

We do not know the identity of many of these birds. Most of them are birds of prey (vultures, ravens, hawks, owls and so on) or are similar in their behaviour to birds of prey. However, we can not learn a rule from this and then decide for ourselves which birds are kosher. Nowadays, we only eat fowl (birds) that have been accepted for generations as kosher species.

General Notes

a) Products that come from non-kosher creatures are also not kosher.

Milk from non-kosher animals is forbidden. **Eggs** from non-kosher birds are forbidden.

Eggs and oil from non-kosher fish are forbidden. **Caviar** is usually made from non-kosher fish eggs and is usually not kosher. **The only exception is honey from bees**, which the Torah specifically allows. Bees produce honey from the nectar of flowers.

b) Blood from animals and birds is forbidden.

The blood of kosher fish is permitted. However, one should not use fish blood that is collected in a bowl because people may think it is from animals or fowl. If it contains some scales it may be used, because it is then clear that it came from fish.

c) In Vayikra (11: 21, 22) the Torah tells us of certain types of locust that are permitted. The Talmud teaches us that all permitted locusts have wings that cover the body. (Chullin 59a)

According to Yemenite tradition, only those locusts that come in swarms are permitted, not those that live separately. (For detailed commentaries see The Living Torah, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan)

There are some Moroccan and Yemenite Jews who have preserved their ancient traditions regarding such kosher insects. However, Ohr HaChaim writes that when he was in Morocco he protested against the eating of any insects because of the difficulty in identifying the few kosher species from the huge number of forbidden ones. He adds that the land had not suffered a locust invasion during the entire twelve years since the people had accepted his rebuke. (Stone Chumash, Artscroll p.601)

Because of doubts regarding the identity of the different species, most Jews do not eat locusts at all.
