



17 - 30 March, 2019
17 - 23 Adar II, 5779

First Torah:

Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47

Second Torah (Parah):

Numbers 19:1-22

Haftorah:

Ezekiel 36:16-36

■ **CALENDARS**

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ **FAMILY PROGRAMS**

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ **GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH**

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

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WHY KEEP KOSHER

This week's parshah, Shemini, introduces the Torah's dietary laws. Animals must chew their cud and have split hooves to be kosher, fish need fins and scales, and a list of forbidden fowl is enumerated.

To those of us in Jewish education, it is a continuing source of disappointment that so many Jews still believe the kosher laws to be outdated. After all, they reckon, in the desert our ancestors needed to protect themselves from trichinosis and all sorts of diabolical diseases so some kind of dietary system was needed. But today, they argue, in an age of refrigeration, government inspection and modern hygiene standards, the kosher laws are archaic, anachronistic and quite dispensable.

How sad. The fact is that the kosher laws were never given to us for health reasons. If they happen to be healthy or provide good hygiene that is purely a fringe benefit. It may well be one of the perks but it has never been the reason.

I often joke that if the kosher laws were for health, then all the rabbis should look like Schwarzenegger! And those who don't keep kosher should look sickly. In fact, anecdotal evidence seems to prove the very opposite; your average religious type looks rather scrawny (or overweight) and the non-kosher guys are the ones with the big biceps!

So let it be stated categorically: kosher is not for

our physical health but for our spiritual health. It is not for our bodies but for our souls. It is a Jewish diet to help Jews remain spiritually sensitive to their innate Jewishness.

While the Torah actually records no official reason for these laws, the rabbis and philosophers have speculated on their purpose. They act as a bulwark against assimilation, we are taught. On a simple level, if we keep kosher, inexorably, we will shop with fellow Jews, socialize with fellow Jews and remain close to Jewish communal life. A rabbinic friend of mine once asked a very high-profile Jewish businessman why he was about to marry a non-Jewish woman. Couldn't he find a "nice Jewish girl"? His reply was very revealing. "I just don't mix in those circles anymore, Rabbi." There is no doubt that had he still kept Kosher his life choices may well have been very different.

On a deeper, more spiritual level, keeping kosher keeps our Jewish souls sensitive to things Jewish. This is clearly a mystical concept and imperceptible to our physical senses, but according to our sages it is a fact. Just as too much red meat or fatty foods are bad for your cholesterol, non-kosher foods are bad for your neshamah. They clog your spiritual arteries and prevent those warm, healthy Jewish feelings from circulating through your kishkes and your consciousness.

It's very important to have a mezuzah on your door. It identifies your home as Jewish. But what really defines your home as a "Jewish Home" - what your zayde

Parshat Shemini

meant when he said with pride "my children run a Jewish home" - is the kitchen. A kosher kitchen makes a Jewish home truly Jewish. It also extends a very warm and eloquent invitation to all fellow Jews. Here you are welcome. Here it is safe to come in and eat. Make yourself at home.

Your favorite diet may build healthy bodies, but a kosher diet builds healthy souls.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

WHEN SAYING NOTHING IS THE RIGHT THING TO SAY

I ran into a friend at the market, and she looked sadder than when I had seen her recently at her father's shiva. "It's hitting me harder now," she paused, looking down, "and there was so much family business going on." At first, I thought she meant those nasty family dynamics that can be catalyzed by a death in the family, but she meant it literally. The people around her were very focused on the "business" of her father's estate, despite her repeated requests that these conversations wait until after the mourning period was over.

Proper shiva protocol requires that people who want to pay their respects do not initiate the conversation; instead, they are to sit quietly and wait for the mourner to speak. They follow the mourner's lead. After all, it's the mourner's show, so to speak—we are there to comfort them, not add to their pain

with inappropriate conversation or behavior. Why is that so hard to do? It's challenging enough to "say the right thing" under difficult circumstances. When we are given a pass, however, where we don't even have to speak except to offer simple mandatory scripted words of condolences, why are we so uncomfortable with silence?

I tried to explain to my friend how people react to grief and mourning differently, where some negate or avoid pain by becoming preoccupied with busy work or mundane matters to feel a sense of control. Looking back, I wish I could take back my words. In a misguided attempt to make her "feel better" or "fix the situation," I was negating her emotions, whereas I should have held the space to witness and validate her experience. Instead of giving her the "gift" of my wisdom and advice, I wish I could have given her the gifts she really needed: empathy, compassion and a silent but warm embrace.

What Is Silence Anyway?

It's one thing to shut down external noise, but what about the noise inside? Have you listened to yourself lately? Research has clocked the average person as having 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day, 95 percent of which are the same thoughts from the day before. And what's worse, 80 percent of our thoughts are negative. Despite the books on mindfulness that I leave strategically around the house, my husband isn't fooled. When he catches me staring into space with darting eyes, he'll ask: "How's the conversation going in your head?" Umm, you probably don't want to know; it's not pretty in there.

Is silence just the absence of noise, the mere cessation of the inner chatter? Try to stop thinking and pretty soon you'll be thinking about how you're trying to stop thinking. Instead of picturing silence as a mere empty void, however, imagine silence as a gateway to another dimension. Silence leads to stillness, which leads to awareness, which leads to presence—the state of being that accepts the present moment as it is. It is the mindful pause that leads us to our center, the natural place of self-regulation, resilience and choice.

Whether you call it emotional mastery or emotional intelligence, it's the space from which we can choose to operate and respond from our highest self, that part of us that is in harmony with our deepest values. Otherwise, the noise in our head that judges, condemns, blames and resists keeps us in a reactive state, and that leads to adverse and undesirable outcomes.

The Silence of Aaron

In Shemini, after the consecration of the Mishkan (the portable tabernacle in the desert), Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, were consumed by a "heavenly fire" when they entered the Holy of Holies without permission or authority to do so. When Aaron learned the heart-breaking news, however, he was silent. He was not without emotion; the commentaries tell us that he was weeping! But when Aaron heard Moses' explanation for their deaths, that G-d considered this to be sanctification, Aaron was silent. Silence allows us to hear profound messages. When we face significant upsets and disappointments or when we incur the unjust wrath or accusations of others, silence gives us the space to consider, what else could this be?

We don't all have the luxury of Moses softening the blow with consoling messages from G-d. Sometimes, there are simply no answers—at least none that we can comprehend with our limited intelligence. Sometimes, life makes absolutely no sense. Someone is in distress, and you struggle for answers as to why they are suffering or why an inexplicably horrible event has happened. When we accept that we don't have the answers, we can open ourselves up to the wisdom of silence. Then, if and when we choose to speak or act (because there are times when we must speak and times we must act), we will serve the moment or the person or the situation in the right way.

So This Time, I Got It Right

Last week I was in synagogue with a woman whose mother recently died after a protracted and painful illness. With tears welling up in her eyes, she shyly confessed how in the last days she was praying for G-d to take her. "I feel a little guilty about that. Was that bad?" Words of advice streamed into my head. Of course, it's not bad! You were an amazing and loving and devoted daughter who couldn't bear to see her mother suffering. But I said nothing, because the real question ("Why did my mother have to suffer so?") could not be answered. Instead, I looked into her eyes with soft tearful eyes of my own and with silence held the space for her to accept it all—the grief and the love, the guilt and the relief.

When in doubt, pause and say this acronym to yourself: WAIT, which stands for: "Why Am I Talking?" Just as we are to use the gift of speech for the good, let us also learn to use the gift of silence. Sometimes, it's just what is needed.

By Hana Perlberger

PASSOVER

If for some reason your orders were not submitted for Passover, please ask the Chaplain or Rabbi to contact our office, we will try to assist with the acquiring of food.

Remember to complete the selling of the chametz form. As your Rabbi or Chaplain for our form.

In Jewish History

Thursday, 21 Adar II, 5779 - March 22, 2019
R. Elimelech of Lizhensk (1786)

The great Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1786) was one of the elite disciples of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. He is also widely known as the No'am Elimelech, the title of the renowned chassidic work he authored.

Rabbi Elimelech attracted many thousands of chassidim, among them many who after his passing became great chassidic masters in their own right. Most notable amongst them was Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin." Many of the current chassidic dynasties trace themselves back to Rabbi Elimelech.