

April 13, 2018

Dear BQLI Region Friends,

If you were to ask an observant Jew why he or she keeps kosher, one may reply, “because God commands me to” or “because it is written in the Torah.” Another answer may be, “because keeping kosher necessitates that I consider my Jewish identity every time I eat.” And, a final favorite, “the laws of Kashrut force me to make choices. Being kosher distinguishes me as a Jew.”

The themes of making choices and setting limits are fundamental to this week’s Torah portion, Shemini. While the portion begins with a detailed description of the animals to be offered at the Tabernacle, we learn that not all animals are fit for sacrifice. Then, subsequent to Aaron’s diligent execution of these sacrifices, a Divine fire consumes his sons, Nadav and Abihu. We learn that not all fire is godly. Moses then forbids Aaron and his surviving sons from mourning publicly, teaching us that there is a time and place for mourning.

Following all this drama, the laws of Kashrut are specified. Again, we learn that not all animals are permitted to us. I’m sure the themes are screaming at you by now...as Jewish people, we must make careful selections.

When considering that God offers these laws of Kashrut at this particular juncture, perhaps the most accurate answer as to why an observant Jew keeps kosher is one that is found in the Torah itself, “You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy.” Kashrut is a way of welcoming the holiness of Judaism into our daily lives. Since we eat, at a minimum, three times a day, by keeping kosher we are constantly reaffirming our Jewish commitment to that which is holy, our covenant with God.

B’Shalom,
Grace