LOW COSTS, HIGH YIELD INVESTMENTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Shemini

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Of the many guidelines the Torah gives regarding Kosher and non-Kosher animals, we are told, "you shall not contaminate yourselves through any crawling thing that creeps on the earth for I am Hashem who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you, you shall be holy for I am holy." (Vayikra/Leviticus 11:44-45). Rashi, bothered by the language of "who elevates", in contrast to the regular "who brought", quotes a clarification offered in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 61b). The Talmud explains that even if the Jewish people would only fulfill the command that they avoid contamination from the consumption of creeping creatures, which other nations do consume, that would be sufficient justification for their elevation from Egypt. The spiritual elevation they would experience from adhering to this charge is the elevation referenced by the verse.

But what is so special about this commandment? It is not as if the nations of the world who do consume these creatures are doing anything wrong in their actions (as they would be if they participated in illicit relationships or idol worship), for they are not commanded to refrain from eating these species. Similarly, there are some creeping creatures we are permitted to eat and there is no spiritual detriment to those who eat them. Furthermore, this is one of the easier commandments to observe, as many find the consumption of creeping creatures most distasteful. If the entirety of what is "wrong" in eating them is simply because of the commandment, and it is an easily abided by commandment at that, why does this offer us such spiritual elevation?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Jewry of his time) elucidates that this is the simple beauty in observing a mitzvah (Divine command). No matter how distasteful the prospect of eating one of these creatures may be, the ultimate reason why we desist is simply because it is G-d's will. Even though much of our initial motivation is our own revulsion, as long as the decisive factor is G-d's preference and not our own, then we are elevated by our choice to

pursue G-d's Divine bidding, instead of our own mundane desires. As long as the act was done for the purpose of the mitzvah, we are elevated as a righteous person. And for those who make the same decision, but follow personal motivations, there is no elevation.

The act is the same...the differences are the inspiration we invest and the elevation we receive as dividends.

Have a good Shabbos!

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