

Simply, Fitting

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In my previous article, *Homosexual Chalitzah*, I contend that the term *toevah*, usually translated *abomination* or *disgust*, is best translated *de-generate*.(1)

By *de-generate*, instead of merely *degenerate*, this designates not merely some smug epithet hurled at someone, often self-righteously, for some kind of socially-disapproved moral or religious offense. Though sometimes related to that, *de-generate* signifies that which subtracts from the *generative* nature of Life: that which does not foster vitality, vibrancy, potency and also (but not restricted to) propagation, but actually undermines Life-in-Creation, especially human and particularly Hebrew Life.

Since in the *Torah*, the separation between kosher and non-kosher foods is frequently framed as either *kasher*,(2) fitting for the Hebrew human being, or *abomination*, this definition – *de-generate* – must function for foodstuffs too, or it is non-functional. I maintain here that it does. However, it does open up a familiar can of modernist (unkosher?) worms:

Why, for example, if something is an *abomination*, such as a snake, would the Rabbis permit it to be eaten under severe life-and-death issues such as starvation? Obviously, the meaning of abomination is not determined by the *Torah law*, nor, for that matter, the rabbinic interpretation of it. Both the written law and its oral interpretations function only *sub specie vitae*. There is Something Larger here than scripture or rabbinic pronouncements: Life.

Placing the value of Life in Creation *prior to* (both in sequence and importance) to human moral enunciations, including societal or religious legalisms, however revered, is the essence of the perspective demonstrated here. I maintain that the *Torah* (and scripture in general) is not a sudden revelation by God to some historical figure, such as Moses. Instead, the *Torah*, the biblical narratives, as well as any real and valuable interpretations, are essentially *human understandings and recordings* of “how Life works” on earth.

This includes how human beings, with their free-wills and technological-skills, interact with nature on earth of which they, bodily, are a “piece.” The purpose of these recorded insights is to simply facilitate the living, historical *experience of good* or *God*. Societal-laws, religious-laws, moral laws, are built up upon this very simple spiritual purpose.

Now over the centuries, there have been many different kinds of perspectives attempting to fathom the “reason” for the *Torah’s kasher*-requirements, so as to make them seem more “rational”:

The *religious* perspective, already addressed above, is that *kashrut* (the system elaborated by the Rabbis upon the *Torah*) is simply part of the Sinai revelation and therefore, it is simply God’s Will. While reasons for *Torah* Laws may be entertained(3), reasons are not the reason for them, but are sort of rational-adjuncts to help incline the will toward obedience.

The *philosophical* perspective maintains that there are certain qualities or virtues which kosher animals or practices represent, and which non-kosher animals or idolatrous practices do not. These qualities, natures or virtues are necessary for the spiritual development of the human being, particularly the Hebrew.

But obviously, this philosophical perspective implies some meta-physical or physiological explanation as well, since these “virtues” must, in some fashion, through the process of eating, be assimilated mentally or spiritually and certainly bodily. This is why the *hygienic* perspective always appears the most solid of Jewish rational interpretations, especially since Maimonides who was biased by virtue of being a physician. It maintains that food that is *kasher* is essentially a health proscription; after all, just a quick glance at biblical *kasher* with its forsaking of pork and shellfish, promptly banishes two major sources of trichina and e-coli, let alone, in this era, cholesterol. Many other laws of *kasher* including laws against *terafah* (tearing off and eating of living limbs), and sabbatical laws requiring periodic rest for the soil, also have obvious hygienic and Life-engendering purposes.

However, such a *hygienic* perspective implies a physiological perspective, and since physiology is inseparable from biology, and biology inseparable from planetary ecology, what is biblically *kasher*, or what later became called *kosher* or the system of *kashrut*, cannot be limited to “mere” hygiene. It simply makes no sense.

All these perspectives have value, as we shall discuss. But, I believe that only by taking a more enlightened approach does what is *kasher, fitting* for humans to eat, makes any *complete* sense. I believe the approach here is foundational, underneath the religious, philosophical and hygienic interpretations– and by which they all come together, with all their dimensions, into a singular, intelligible understanding that makes both rational and spiritual sense simultaneously, indeed *common sense*. I believe this perspective makes *kasher, simple*.

I believe this is accomplished without relying on the doctrine of the *Torah's* Sinai origin. However, the approach taken here, although obviously modern, if not post-modern, actually heightens the value and meaning of scripture; it does not degrade it, as, unfortunately, many modern biblical critiques cannot avoid doing.

There is, obviously, degeneration in nature. There is natural degeneration resulting from the decay of physical life, the dismantling of organic structures back into their earthly constituents. Whether plant or animal this takes place. It also happens, in a sense, geologically, though death is not its initiator.

However, as with all aspects or qualities of nature, human beings have a capacity called "free will", to *concentrate, specify, and will* these into human *invention*. For example, we can readily observe nature's capacity for flight; somehow, we concentrate this, specify its laws according to our understanding, and then will it materially into regularly scheduled flights around the world. There is "abortion" in nature, usually called "miscarriage"; yet, human beings have the capacity to concentrate this, specify it, and will it as medically-needed, or, more controversially, as we might simply want. All this is simply, in essence, "technology": the concentration, specification and willing of aspects or qualities within nature, by humans for human purpose.

But, this great gift of free-willed technology brings with it the potential for what has been glibly called "sin" or "evil." (4) We human beings can be willful in such a way as to violate the Creation of which we are a part, from which our very technological gifts emerge. Since our bodies are actually individualizations of this Creation, when we violate Creation we violate our own selves, suffering these violations personally. For example: poison the air through an internal combustion engine, and the incidence of asthma rise. Then, we must re-think our will, act differently, and re-align our industrial design according to God's *Order or Commandment*, which is nature's "design." (5) We *repent – retell* a different story for ourselves. We concentrate, specify and will again, better. We learn.

Similarly to above, degeneration, which is a property of nature, can be also concentrated, specified and freely-willed through human invention. If the invention *aligns* human action and nature's design, God's Creation is not damaged and can actually be potentiated: I may accelerate decay and actually design compost which is unusually nutrient-rich, so it augments plant growth.

But, if the invention is *un-aligned* or *misaligned* to nature's design, then, human beings will concentrate and increase the natural degeneration in Creation; through the human

agent, degeneration becomes *de-generation* and Creation can be damaged: I can hunt, just for sport, excessive numbers of animals, creating huge quantities of rotting carnage, leading also to de-speciation.

This is sin, evil, in the moral sense. This is just a summary of the *spirito-natural* foundation of what is usually called *moral conscience*.

The *co-operation* of human will with God's *Order* or *Commandment* in nature, is therefore a spiritual, moral, intellectual and bodily necessity for ourselves personally, as well as upon earth. The *alignment* of human free will with God's Will is the *spirito-natural* foundation of what we call *covenant*. It is not fundamentally religious, through it may be expressed through religious terms.

While it has been a tendency of religion— especially as an artifact of the belief in scriptural *revelation*— to view *kashrut* as some kind of abstract system, plopped down upon Sinai *in toto*, interpreted through an ecclesiastic elite, questioned to your own God-threatened peril, this is not an enlightened, contemporary perspective.

One cannot understand what is *kasher*, unless one understands it in the context of the human spiritual and earthly natural; the “religious” is derived secondarily from these. The error of religion has been making “religion”, particularly the belief in a particular scriptural *revelation*, as primary, and the spiritual and natural secondary. This essentially inverted the *Order* of Creation, putting human understanding prior to God's “understanding”, so-to-speak: *idolatry*.

The written-down *Torah* laws of what is “fitting” to eat are not fathomable unless we understand them spiritually and naturally, that is, in a *living historical* context, in which the Hebrew people and such laws arose. Such a *living history* is not merely some “thought system” passed off as history, disconnected to real bodies and biology, i.e. Creation. After all, the surrounding tribes, perhaps the very tribes from which we arose, were clearly participating in de-generate behavior. For instance: artificially milking the mother, boiling the kid in its mother's milk, while the mother is present, sensing, smelling, growling in maternal agony.(6) This, and other examples, such as the eating of trichina-infested swine, predatory birds that feast on diseased carrion, and other de-generative food sources, often went hand-in-hand with child ritual sacrifice, usually by burning, as well as cultic prostitution with orgiastic body-slashing , and other savory technologies.

While such behaviors, when seen through an intellectually-sanitized theological lens, are often carelessly labeled “pagan”,(7) a violation of *religious* law, the violation is, fundamentally, creational: the excess of human free-willed technology is used to

concentrate, specify and will into invention a human-engineered de-generation of nature. The degeneration naturally occurring is artificially concentrated, specified, and willed into de-generation.

The result? Human health and vitality are threatened. The possibility of a stable, propagative, enduring civilization and *history*, in the theological sense, is undermined. Earthly-nature, what we might today call “ecology”, is threatened. Agriculture and productivity diminishes due to de-generacy. And although back in “bible-times”, the consequences of such de-generation were fairly localized to the Near East, these days, one can readily imagine the global-consequence of de-generation should it become excessive and widespread, for example, animal-virus pandemics such as swine flu. Under such a pressingly urgent and de-generative assault, both to human life and earthly Life, it should not be surprising that God or Nature(8) might raise up a contending group of tribes, with a saner more Life-Centered, more naturally-respectful approach to God’s Creation, in order to contain, condemn and condemn the behavior which had reached dangerous critical mass, bringing re-balancing and re-flourishing to both human civilization and earthy-nature.

Such a tribe would have to be designed to concentrate, specify and will into this unseemly mess, another aspect of nature: the *lines, boundaries, fixed-relationships* or *laws*, the “moral laws” that are necessary to generate and re-generate Life.

Such a group, commonly called the *Hebrews*, becoming aware of their own *distinction* from their de-generate relatives, noticing that they seem uniquely impelled-by-nature, *chosen* as an instrument to correct this de-generative imbalance, might eventually record their understanding of the workings of God’s *Order* or *Commandment* in nature, as follows:

Take heed to yourselves lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and He shall shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.(9)

Leaving aside the confusions and complications of rabbinic *kashrut*– the separate plates and cookware, *shechittah* (ritual slaughter), the rabbinic *heckshers*, etc.– and paying only attention to the proscriptions of what the *Torah* calls *kasher*, it is clear that every proscription aims to concentrate, specify and will a decrease in de-generation, and an increase in generation. It achieves this by diminishing and avoiding all the

“components” that are involved in natural degeneration: *dirt, dung, decay, death, disease, destruction and desecration.*

At first glance, we may not notice why it is forbidden to eat rabbits and, at the same time, most insects (The exceptions are discussed below.) But, they both burrow in the dirt. There is no permitted creature that is a burrower. Dirt is the issue. Not rabbits and insects *per se.*

At first glance, even without knowledge of trichina, we might not understand why a pig would not be permitted, and why only fish with scales and fins, are. But, we must remember that pigs can be readily observed to eat their own excrement. Fish with scales and fins, differently than let's say scale-less catfish, do not eat excrement from the water's bottom-floor; moreover, they possess a easily gut-able alimentary canal, so the dung is removed. This is quite contrary to the euphemistic “de-veining” of a shrimp; removing shrimp excrement before devouring it in cocktail sauce. *Dung* is the issue; not pigs or seafood *per se.*

At first glance, we may not notice why eating of blood is forbidden, when a blood-drenched filet mignon can be very tempting. But, when we realize the literal blood-thirstiness of these de-generative tribes, towards each other and other creatures, with the ripping out of living limbs for food (*terefah*), then, diminishing death through bloodlust becomes critical to civilization and nature alike. *Death, destruction, desecration* is the issue; not “juicy meat” *per se.*

At first glance, we may not understand why a mother bird must be shoo-ed away, should a Hebrew desire to eat an egg; but, then we should remind ourselves of the desecration that has taken place on our planet by those who follow the more common, more Western (Roman) dietary proscriptions which permit the eating of anything that tastes good, without limit.

It should also make perfect sense why such food proscriptions went hand-in-hand with the forbidding of rapacious homosexual relations that undermine conjugal rights and reproduction, the forbidding of bestiality, as well as why there is the proscription of a generative, prospective *incest taboo*, which would guarantee a propagative, flourishing and evolving biogenetic, historical people.

Clearly, the earlier-mentioned hygienic perspective of these laws are completely inseparable from the biological, physiological, the ecological and also the civilizational and historical, which are all secondary to the spiritual and the natural: *sub specie vitae*, or *sub specie natura.* Dare we say “God”?

What about the *philosophical* perspective? Interesting, isn't it, that animals with cloven feet and that chew their cud, are mostly *vegetarian*, i.e. they "represent" a "virtue" of being less prone to blood-violence, more "peaceful." Such a "virtue" that the cow "represents", is due to the fact that these animals are *ruminants*, with four-compartment stomachs that hyper-digest foods, leaving far less contaminants that might otherwise be internalized by human stock. These intellectually-discerned "virtues" go hand-in-hand with the fact that these cows can be easily domesticated. The symbolic meaning of *kasher* is a *true* symbol- from the Greek *sympallein*: all these components are *thrown together* by God's design in nature. The actual nature of the cow is inseparately-tied to its "symbol" of being "peaceful." The "virtue" is not the reason, but, is the result of how this creature was physiologically "designed" or evolved.

The same goes for the permissibility of certain insects, such as grasshoppers and crickets. These members of the *orthoptera* family do not bite human beings, suck blood, further decreasing disease and death. In this sense, they too may be considered to have a "virtue" of "peaceful" not unlike the cow. While they may lay their eggs sometimes in the dirt, they, as adults, do not burrow; they are green-leaf grazers like cows. Moreover, they are natural agricultural predators to human crops, so, in eating them, there is a kind of a natural balance to any required bloodshed towards these insects. Once again, the so-called philosophical "virtues" are inseparable from their created natures, and secondary to them.

This spirito-biological perspective sees *kashrut* not as a religious system which must be cult-enforced, with the promise of either blessing or curse, salvation or perdition, for those who uphold or break it. *Kashrut* is simply an elaboration of a foundational law of nature. It is fitting not merely for the human being, but also, specifically, for the Hebrew people who are seeking *real transcendence*, i.e. *dominion* over the earth, as well as a universal history which we herald.

Depreciating the de-generative, augmenting the generative, in food, in culture, in thought, in law, in all human invention, in a way that also abides with the specific ecological demands and species indigenous to our Near East origin, is an essential expression of our particular God-inspired culture.

There are conceivably many kinds of *kashrut*, for different cultures, each with varying indigenous species. But, all of them will have to, in some fashion, contend with the fact that the human capacity to concentrate, specify and will de-generation into nature through eating, can cause destruction both to human civilization and to the earth. They will all have to find different ways to handle this human challenge.

As you study *Torah's kasher* proscriptions for yourself, you will notice that each one, by avoiding some “d” – *dirt, dung, decay, death, disease, destruction and desecration* – corrects the de-generation willed into invention by de-generate tribes such as the Canaanite, Amelkite and Hittite. You'll also notice that *kasher* ensures the re-generation of the generative nature of earthly life. Its intention is to restore a cooperation between human dominion and God's dominion-in-nature, an *alignment, a covenant*.

Human beings evolve from the earth. We are, in Hebrew, *adam*, from the same root as *adamah*, earth/ground, from which we spring. Our spiritual growth from the earth requires our distinction, and separation, from the degenerative aspects within Nature, so that we can evolve to express wider aspects of Creation, beyond the earth, which inhere within our psychic (soul) structure. *Kashrut* can hardly be considered a religious system. It is hardly, merely, a philosophical system. It is hardly, merely, a hygienic system.

It is not a “system”. Food which is *kasher* is an expression of God's Laws-in-Creation. In this era, in our particular “modern” culture, we cannot fail to notice:

People are eating huge quantities of red (blood-infused) meat and simultaneously, there is presence of aggression and violence in the world. People are consuming non-kosher seafood and pork, and their triglycerides and cholesterol are damaging their hearts. By shirking these, doctors, without realizing it, are suggesting people be more “kosher”. The basis of this pronouncement is not religious, but scientific, and yet they coincide seamlessly.

These days, there is a sizable movement to counter the unhealthy contaminants to the Western diet which is enveloping the world. The de-generation to human health and to the planet has reached such a point that we forced to legislate a “koshering” of how industry farms, processes and distributes food. People are banishing poisonous ingredients (no disease). There is increased organic farming with sabbatical years–periods of land left fallow (no desecration). We notice government crackdown of *e-coli* (no dung) contamination in meats. We notice legislation that demands animals be treated correctly (no destruction). *Kasher* is a universal law of nature. The Hebrews were aware of this 3500 years ago!

However, let us also be clear. While these laws of the *Torah* remain purposeful, a lot has changed in our world since they were first put forth. There has been an evolution of human culture and life. There has been massive technological innovations that allow us to farm globally and not merely locally. There have been genetic-modification that can alter the nature of species and food supplies with even greater speed and plasticity.

There are new kinds of pork from quite peaceful, non-predatory, animals, which are strictly vegetarian and have evolved “virtues” their own, perhaps worthy of consideration.

Life evolves. So *kashrut* must, always, evolve.

Kasher is never a fixed system, proscribed once and for all eternity. It is not a fixed religious *revelation*. It is a *living system* that depends upon the state-of-human spirituality, physiology, culture etc., as well as the state of the earth, all its geologic formations and all the creatures upon it.

Kasher is an intimate expression of the Divine Natural Impulse by which both earthly-nature and human spirit are coordinated together through history. The rules or laws in our scriptures are valuable *guidelines*, but they cannot account for every contingency and exigency. When you take these guidelines and make them “godlines”, you create the obsession-compulsion around diet which plagues many religious communities.

Truly *kasher* requires human beings to learn how to integrate spiritually with the laws of God in nature. Truly *kasher* requires us to regain our intuitive-integration with the natural Laws of Life, so that we instinctually know, sense, smell, intuit– not unlike some of the so-called “lower” creatures– what is correct and fitting for us to eat. Truly *kasher* requires us to find our way back to the Garden of Eden again: where nature’s intricate design and our new technological skills (more advanced now than mere hands for fruit-picking), cooperate in mutual-benefit and integrity, where we are One within God’s *Order* in nature, obeying God’s Living Commandments built into the structure of nature, yet not limited to them.

Alas, we human beings are still waiting for this messianic promise. It’s been quite a long time. And it will take more time still. In the meantime, the *Torah* still stands as a superb guideline, particularly for the Jew and universally, with others, on how to eat in a way that enhances life.

Simply, fitting!

Footnotes:

1. The emphasis on procreation as the “final end” of any sexuality, has tended to deny that any non-procreative sexuality is generative. This has produced a terrible anti-naturalist bias in Western theology, with an austere separation between so-called “covenanted” and so-called “pagan”, the latter which has been demonized wholesale.
2. See *Leviticus*, Chapter 11: 1-47
3. For instance see, *Guide*, 3:48
4. The words “sin” and “evil” have been greatly distorted by the religionist perspective. I am attempting here to put it on a solid, rational foundation, which does not rely on scriptural revelation or tradition as the criterion of moral correctness, but to give it an ontology based in the reality of nature design.
5. By “design,” I do not mean that Creation was exactly architected by God, and that there is only a fixed, autocratic, design, which does not change. Today, we might say that God supplied “design parameters”, so-to-speak, and not the design *per se*.
6. *Exodus* 23:19
7. We must, in this era, distinguish, shall we say, the “Hindu” from the Canaanite. Not all nature-cultures are de-generate. This is an excess of the idealist, religionist, catholic viewpoint.
8. There continues to be confusion as to whether God is Nature or not; this has particularly been problematic since the scientific perspective, which, more or less, assumes Spinoza’s belief that God *is* Nature. We cannot know the scale of Existence, whether it is another universe that precedes our universe or a “God”, some Universe-of-universes. I believe the issue of whether God and Nature are the same, is an issue of scale. Nevertheless, we must be careful about glibly confusing the two. This is not easy in practice.
9. *Deut.* 11:17ff.

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