

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Shemini/ Shabbat Hachodesh
April 6, 2024 *** 27 Adar II, 5784

Shemini in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2875/jewish/Shemini-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Shemini," means "eighth" and it is found in Leviticus 9:1.

On the eighth day, following the seven days of their inauguration, Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as kohanim (priests); a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the altar, and the divine presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, offer a "strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not" and die before G-d. Aaron is silent in face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of non-kosher birds is given, and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts).

Also in Shemini are some of the laws of ritual purity, including the purifying power of the mikvah (a pool of water meeting specified qualifications) and the wellspring. Thus the people of Israel are enjoined to "differentiate between the impure and the pure."

Hachodesh in a Nutshell: Exodus 12:1-20

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/74477/jewish/Hachodesh-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This being the Shabbat that falls on or before the first of Nissan, we also read the section of Hachodesh (Exodus 12:1–20), which relates G-d's words to Moses in Egypt two weeks before the Exodus, instructing us to set the Jewish calendar by the monthly new moon, and to regard Nissan as the "head of months." G-d also instructs to bring the Passover offering, to eat it with matzah and bitter herbs, and to abstain from leaven for seven days.

Shabbat Hachodesh Haftarah in a Nutshell" Ezekiel 45:18 – 46: 15

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/659336/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This special *haftarah* is a prophecy regarding the Paschal Offering that will be brought during the Messianic Era, reflecting the theme of the *Hachodesh* Torah reading—Moses' command to the Israelites in Egypt to

prepare and bring the Paschal lamb.

This *haftorah* is part of Ezekiel's prophecy regarding the third Holy Temple—its structure, inauguration and some of the practices that will be observed therein.

The *haftorah* begins with a description of the various sacrifices that will be offered during the Temple's seven-day inauguration ceremony, and then mentions that on the 14th of Nissan we shall bring the Paschal offering.

Much of the rest of the *haftorah* is devoted to the sacrifices that will be brought by the "leader," and prescribes his entry and exit from the Temple.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Spontaneity: Good or Bad? By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z'l

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemini/spontaneity-good-or-bad/>
Shemini tells the tragic story of how the great inauguration of the Tabernacle, a day about which the Sages said that God rejoiced as much as He had at the creation of the universe, was overshadowed by the death of two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu:

"Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorised fire before the Lord, which [God] had not instructed them [to offer]. Fire came out from the Presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord". [Lev. 10:1-2](#)

Many explanations were given by the Sages and later commentators as to what Nadav and Avihu's sin actually was. But the simplest answer, given by the Torah itself here and elsewhere ([Num. 3:4](#), [Num. 26:61](#)), is that they acted on their own initiative. They did what they had not been commanded. They acted spontaneously, perhaps out of sheer enthusiasm in the mood of the moment, offering "[unauthorised fire](#)". Evidently it is dangerous to act spontaneously in matters of the spirit.

But is it? Moses acted spontaneously in far more fraught circumstances when he shattered the Tablets of Stone upon seeing the Israelites cavorting around the Golden Calf. The tablets – hewn and engraved by God Himself – were perhaps the holiest objects there have ever been. Yet Moses was not punished for his act. The Sages said that though he acted of his own accord without first consulting God, God assented to this act. Rashi refers to this moment in his very last comment on the Torah, whose last verse ([Deut. 34:12](#)) speaks about "all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel":

**לעיני כל ישראל: שנשאו לבו לשבור הלוחות לעיניהם, שנאמר (לעיל
ט, יז) ואשברם לעיניכם**

והסכימה דעת הקב"ה לדעתו, שנאמר (שמות לד, א) אשר שברת, :יִישָׁר כַּחַךְ שִׁשְׁבֶּרֶת

This refers to when Moses] took the liberty of shattering the Tablets before their eyes, as it is said, "I shattered them before your eyes." The Holy One, Blessed be He, consented to his opinion, as it is said, "which you shattered" – 'More power to you for shattering them!'

Why then was spontaneity wrong for Nadav and Avihu yet right for Moshe Rabbeinu? The answer is that Nadav and Avihu were Kohanim, Priests. Moses was a Navi, a Prophet. These are two different forms of religious leadership. They involve different tasks, different sensibilities, indeed different approaches to time itself.

The Kohen serves God in a way that never changes over time (except, of course, when the Temple was destroyed and its service, presided over by the Kohanim, came to an end). The Prophet serves God in a way that is constantly changing over time. When people are at ease the Prophet warns of forthcoming catastrophe. When they suffer catastrophe and are in the depths of despair, the Prophet brings consolation and hope.

The words said by the Kohen are always the same. The priestly blessing uses the same words today as it did in the days of Moses and Aaron. But the words used by a Prophet are never the same. As it is noted:

"No two Prophets use the same style." [*Sanhedrin 89a*](#)

So for a Prophet spontaneity is of the essence. But for the Kohen engaged in Divine service it is completely out of place.

Why the difference? After all, the Priest and the Prophet were serving the same God. The Torah uses a kind of device we have only recently re-invented in a somewhat different form. Stereophonic sound – sound coming from two different speakers – was developed in the 1930s to give the impression of audible perspective. In the 1950s 3D film was developed to do for sight what stereo had done for sound. From the work of Pierre Broca in the 1860s to today, using MRI and PET scans, neuroscientists have striven to understand how our bicameral brain allows us to respond more intelligently to our environment than would otherwise have been possible. Twin perspectives are needed fully to experience reality.

The twin perspectives of the Priest and Prophet correspond to the twin perspectives on creation represented, respectively, by [Genesis 1:1–2:3](#) (spoken in the priestly voice, with an emphasis on order, structure, divisions and boundaries), and [Genesis 2:4–3:24](#) (spoken in the prophetic voice, with an emphasis on the

nuances and dynamics of interpersonal relationships).

Now let us consider one other area in which there was an ongoing argument between structure and spontaneity, namely *tefillah*, prayer, specifically the Amidah. We know that after the destruction of the Temple, Rabban Gamliel and his court at Yavneh established a standard text for the weekday Amidah, comprising eighteen or later nineteen blessings in a precise order ([Mishnah Brachot 4:3](#)).

Not everyone, however, agreed. Rabbi Joshua held that individuals could say an abridged form of the Amidah. According to some interpretations, Rabbi Eliezer was opposed to a fixed text altogether and held that one should, each day, say something new (Talmud Yerushalmi [Brachot 4](#)).

It seems that this disagreement is precisely parallel to another one about the source of the daily prayers:

It has been stated: R. Jose, son of R. Hanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. R. Joshua b. Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices. [Brachot 26b](#)

According to R. Jose, son of R. Hanina, Shacharit was established by Abraham, Minchah by Isaac, and Maariv by Jacob. According to R. Joshua b. Levi, Shacharit corresponds to the daily morning sacrifice, and Minchah to the afternoon sacrifice. On the face of it, the disagreement has no practical consequences, but in fact it does.

If the prayers were instituted by the patriarchs, then their origin is prophetic. If they were established to replace the sacrifices, then their provenance is priestly. Priests were forbidden to act spontaneously, but Prophets did so as a matter of course. Someone who saw prayer as priestly would, like Rabban Gamliel, emphasise the importance of a precise text. One who saw it as prophetic would, like Rabbi Eliezer as understood by the Talmud Yerushalmi, value spontaneity and each day try to say something new.

Tradition eventually resolved the matter in a most remarkable way. We say each Amidah twice, once privately and silently in the tradition of the Prophets, then a second time publicly and collectively by the *shaliach tzibbur*, the "reader's repetition", in the tradition of a Priest offering a sacrifice at the Temple. (It is easy to understand why there is no reader's repetition in the Maariv service: there was no sacrifice at night-time). During the silent Amidah we are permitted to add extra words of our own. During the repetition we are not. That is because Prophets acted spontaneously, but Priests did not.

The tragedy of Nadav and Avihu is that they made the mistake of acting like Prophets when they were, in fact, Priests. But we have inherited both traditions,

and wisely so, for without structure, Judaism would have no continuity, but without spontaneity it would have no fresh life. The challenge is to maintain the balance without ever confusing the place of each.

[Honoring Aaron's Tragic Sacrifice in the Laws of Mourning by Shira Billet](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/honoring-aarons-tragic-sacrifice-in-the-laws-of-mourning/)

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In Parashat Shemini, a community's joyous celebration turns into shocking tragedy. The Tabernacle had finally been completed ([Exod. 40](#)). Even before resting in a permanent settlement, this people, recently freed from slavery, was eager to have a portable sanctuary for God's presence. They had contributed generously from their limited possessions ([Exod. 35](#)). Moses had begun to communicate with God through the Tent of Meeting ([Lev. 1](#)). The day for a public celebration – 8 days of festive inauguration – had finally come ([Lev. 8](#)).

Aaron and his four sons were the community's intermediaries in the service of the Tabernacle. They dutifully followed each instruction commanded by God through Moses. All were filled with joy and trepidation.

The parashah begins on the eighth and final day of inauguration week. The ceremony narrated in [Leviticus 9](#) culminates in a felicitous and ecstatic moment of response from God to their carefully orchestrated sacrificial rites: "Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt-offering . . . on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted and fell on their faces" ([Lev. 9:23-24](#)).

But in this moment of awe and ecstasy, something goes terribly wrong. In the verse that immediately follows, Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu offer a "strange fire" to God. And suddenly there is a horrific and tragic reversal. With the exact same words that described the joyous revelation of God's presence in community, things take an unspeakable turn: "And fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed them; thus they died." ([Lev. 10:2](#)).

There is both a communal and a personal dimension to this tragedy. The community's loss is twofold: With a shocking suddenness, their moment of celebration has turned to a moment of grief; and they have lost two cherished leaders. For Aaron, the grief is deeply personal. His beloved sons have died in their prime, in the line of duty—a duty he raised and trained them to fulfill. And yet, he is in the midst of performing a sacred rite in which he is the star of the show and the central actor. There is no quiet place to which to retreat to wail, to mourn, and to wallow in the pain. He could not be in a more public setting, or more needed by his community, than he was in that moment.

In the unspeakable void created by these sudden deaths, before Aaron speaks a word, Moses breaks the silence, stating: "This is it that the Lord spoke, saying: Through them that are nigh unto Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified" ([Lev.10:3](#)). And as for Aaron, the same verse reports, "And Aaron was silent" (vayidom) The medieval biblical commentator Nahmanides suggests that Aaron had been wailing out loud, and after Moses spoke, he became silent.

Did Moses silence Aaron's expression of pain? It is hard to know if Moses hoped these words would bring comfort or if he was trying to repress raw expressions of grief. From the continuation of the chapter, it is clear that Moses felt it was a top priority to ensure that the day's rites be properly completed. Mourning would have to be deferred for the sake of the religious needs of the community.

[Leviticus 10](#) is a highly generative chapter for rabbinic discussions of *Hilkhot Aveilut* (the laws of mourning). Ironically, most of the Jewish mourning practices derived from this chapter come from behaviors that were forbidden to Aaron and his surviving sons. They were told not to mourn, and from this we learn exactly how Jews should mourn. They were told not to rend their clothes ([Lev. 10:6](#)), and so we learn to rend our garments upon losing a relative (B. [Moed Katan 15a](#)). They were told they must continue to trim their hair, and so we learn to avoid shaving for a period of time after the death of a loved one.

We see a similar dynamic in [Ezekiel 24](#). The prophet is told not to mourn the death of his wife, "the delight of his eyes" ([Ezek. 24:16](#)). Ezekiel, a priest and a prophet – a community leader – is told to grieve "in silence" (dom) ([Ezek. 24:17](#)). The rabbis derive further universal mourning practices from what Ezekiel could not do (B. [Moed Katan 15a](#)). Ezekiel was told to leave on his shoes ([Ezek. 24:17](#)), and so we remove our shoes when we mourn our dead.

This is tragic, but also powerful. Community leaders often are forced to sacrifice their own emotional needs—especially private experiences of grief—for the sake of maintaining stability, structure, and continuity—and even joy and celebration—for communities that rely on them to remain present and resilient.

I want to suggest that the rabbinic laws of mourning honor Aaron's sacrifice by deriving mourning rites from the sacrifice he made by not engaging in those very rites. In mourning our loved ones, we recall and pay homage to Aaron's inability to mourn his sons. Rashi states that Aaron was rewarded for his silence. Perhaps the eternal monument to Aaron's pain that constitutes the laws of mourning can be seen as another facet of Aaron's "reward."

But Aaron was not completely silent. If we read until the end of Chapter 10, we see that Aaron remained silent as Moses guided the retrieval of the bodies from

the sanctuary; silent as Moses told him not to mourn; silent as God shares rules for priestly conduct; silent as Moses told him to continue observing the public sacrificial rites that were to be performed that day. Only in the penultimate verse in the chapter does Aaron speak, for the first time, since the deaths of his sons. According to Maimonides (Laws of Mourning 1:1), those first and only words that Aaron speaks in the aftermath of losing two children ([Lev. 10:19](#)) are the source for the biblical commandment to mourn, in general.

What did Aaron say? What words could he speak, in this unspeakable time, that could form the eternal basis of all Jewish mourning?

Aaron's words are a response to a rebuke from Moses. Aaron had spent the day on which his sons died not mourning, fulfilling every single public ritual rite with impeccable precision – every rite, with one exception. He could not bring himself to eat the sin-offering, as he was supposed to do. This angered Moses, who rebuked his brother.

Aaron responded, "See this day they brought their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten sin offering today, would that have been good in the eyes of the Lord?" Aaron's sons had died in the immediate aftermath of bringing these offerings. How could he bear to eat from the sin-offering? Aaron finally breaks his silence by resisting one act of not mourning. Through this one small act of resistance, Aaron, the community leader who sacrificed all of his private grief for the sake of the community's stability, finally mourned.

Moses accepted Aaron's explanation. And Maimonides derived from it the basis of the entire biblical commandment to mourn. This is a profound way to honor what Aaron did. As tragic as the position of community leaders can be, as painful as it is that our tradition asked this of Aaron, there is something redeeming about the way in which Aaron's sacrifice did not go unrecognized. In all of our mourning, we honor Aaron's silent pain over the loss of his sons. Indeed, as the additional example from [Ezekiel 24](#) demonstrates, we honor the pain of all who have been called to make similar sacrifices. (*Shira Billet is Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought and Ethics*)

[The Bat and the Penguin by Natan Slifkin](#)

<https://www.rationalistjudaism.com/p/the-bat-and-the-penguin>

Hooray, it's *parashat Shemini!* My favorite *parasha* discusses a wealth of animals, both in the list of eight reptiles that transmit impurity when dead, and in the laws of kosher and non-kosher creatures. And for this post, I'd like to talk about bats and penguins. Which, conveniently, were on hand for me to take a selfie with just now.

The Torah gives a list of birds that are not kosher; whatever is not mentioned, is *ipso facto* kosher. At the end of the list of non-kosher birds is the *atalef*, which has long been universally understood to refer to the bat.

This seems problematic – the bat is a mammal, not a bird. It has fur, not feathers; it does not have a beak; and it gives birth to live young that it nurses on milk, rather than laying eggs. So why is it in the list of non-kosher birds?

In the 19th century there was a court case in New York about whether whales are classified as fish and thus their oil would be taxed under the category of fish oil. The court ruled that they are indeed fish. This was not a mistake. Words do not have objective meanings; they mean whatever they are taken to mean. While scientists use the word "fish" to refer to a specific group of cold-blooded creatures, whalers (who were intimately aware of the biological differences between whales and fish) used the word "fish" to refer to anything that swims, including whales. And the court decided that since whalers were (at that time) more prominent than scientists, their definition of the word is what counts.

Likewise, in 21st century English, the word "bird" has a very specific meaning, referring to something with feathers and a beak that lays eggs. However the Biblical word "*ohf*" just doesn't have the same meaning. Bats fly, and hence although the bat is not a bird, it is an *ohf*.

But what about ostriches? According to the Gemara (albeit disputed by Yehudah Feliks), one of the other birds in the Torah's list, the *bat ha-yaanah*, is an ostrich, which does not fly!

The answer is that the word *ohf* does not mean "flying creature." The Torah's classification is a "folk taxonomy" (this is not an insulting or heretical term; it is an academic term with a specific meaning described in *The Torah Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom*). There aren't specific criteria to be an "*ohf*." Rather, it means something "birdish." Things can be birdish in different ways. Bats are birdish because they fly. An ostrich is birdish because it has a beak and two legs and feathers.

That solves the problem with bats and birds. But what does this mean for penguins? Penguins would also be in the category of *ohf*. They do not fly, but they are birdish. So, given that the penguin is a "bird" in the Torah classification, and it is not mentioned in the Torah's list of non-kosher birds, does that mean that it is

kosher?

I would strongly argue that it is *not* kosher. But in order to explain why, we'll have to first discuss a different bird: the secretary bird.

The secretary bird, as those who have joined my Africa trips (or remember the old Disney film *Bedknobs & Broomsticks*) will know, is a very unusual bird. Its basic body (and beak) shape is that of a bird of prey, but it has a long tail, and exceptionally long legs, like a flamingo. It also has a remarkable crest of feathers sprouting from its head, like a writing-quill stuck behind the ears, which earns its name. The secretary bird lives only in sub-Saharan Africa, and is definitely not in the Torah's list of non-kosher birds. Nor could it reasonably be described as being included in the same *min* as one of the birds in the Torah's list, since it looks so utterly different from all of them.

On the other hand, there is absolutely no way that a secretary bird can be kosher. It's a bird of prey! It eats snakes and mongooses and hares and even young gazelles. Ramban states that the fundamental reason for non-kosher birds being non-kosher is that they are predatory. And while it seems to be a difficult overreach to say that it's the *only* reason for birds being non-kosher (since it would not account for certain non-kosher birds such as hoopoes and bats), it would seem clear that it is a *sufficient* reason. And the Mishnah in Chullin states explicitly that all predatory birds are not kosher.

There's just no way, conceptually or halachically, that a secretary bird could be kosher. And yet it's not one of the birds in the Torah's list of non-kosher birds!

The only possible answer is that the Torah's list of non-kosher birds is not comprehensive. Rather, following the Talmudic-based principles that I developed in my [encyclopedia](#) and in my book *The Camel, The Hare & The Hyrax*, we can say as follows. The animals of the Torah are the animals of Biblical lands. The four animals listed as possessing only one of the three kosher signs are the sole such animals in that region, not in the entire world. The ten types of mammals listed in Parashas Re'ay as being the kosher mammals are the sole such animals in that region, not in the entire world - the moose, chevrotain and okapi are also kosher. Likewise, the two dozen birds listed as being non-kosher are the non-kosher birds of that region, not of the entire world.

Now, this is the kind of thing that immediately gets the Kefira Cops revving up and ready to slam me as a heretic. But, after I came up with this approach, I then

discovered that it's actually a Tosafos!

The Gemara in Chullin states that the Torah gives the most concise way of telling us which creatures we may and may not eat. Since there are more kosher birds than non-kosher birds, the Torah lists only the non-kosher birds. Now, Rashi explains this to mean that there are no non-kosher birds in the entire world other than the two dozen listed (which can only include other birds of the same type/*min*). But Tosafos (Chullin 61a) says that this does not have to be what the Gemara is saying. Rather, the Gemara could mean that listing the two dozen non-kosher birds gives us a way to identify which types of birds in general are not kosher, i.e. those which are similar in some critical way to the birds listed! *Baruch shekivanti*.

Accordingly, since the non-kosher birds listed in the Torah include all the local predatory birds, we can extrapolate and conclude that the secretary bird is not kosher. And since it also includes fishing birds such as cormorants and gulls, penguins would likewise *not* be kosher.

Shabbat Shalom! And if you want to understand this topic better, come visit the Hall of Kosher Classification at the [Biblical Museum of Natural History](#). Meanwhile, another significant animal in this week's *parasha* is the hyrax, and you can freely download the chapter from my encyclopedia on the hyrax at [this page](#). (*Natan Slifkin is the Director of the Biblical Museum of Natural History*)

[Dividing Animals into Pure and Impure: We kee these rules to observe God's Will and for our Jewish Self-Definition by Dr. Gila Vachman](https://schechter.edu/dividing-animals-into-pure-and-impure-we-keep-these-rules-to-observe-gods-will-and-for-our-jewish-self-definition/)

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Jews and Gentiles have different responsibilities in the world according to the midrashim in Vayikra Rabbah and Midrash Tanhuma.

The last chapter of Parashat Shemini, which is actually the middle of the whole Torah, is devoted entirely to one topic: Animals. To be more precise: it divides the animals into pure and impure, indicating which animals are allowed to be eaten and which animals are not.

In great detail, the Torah enumerates the signs of every animal, on the ground, in the water and in the air: does it chew the cud or does it have cloven hooves, does it have fins and scales, how many legs does it have and does it jump or fly.

The prohibition to eat pork or shrimp is probably one of the most associated with

Judaism, and it probably seemed very strange to the nations surrounding the Israelites from ancient times: why not eat these animals? What does it matter if the fish has scales or not?

It seems that this question also troubled our sages, since in the midrashim on Parashat Shemini one can find at least three different answers to the question: Why are we forbidden to eat certain foods?

In Midrash Vayikra Rabbah, two parables are given, one after the other.

The first, in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, tells of a man who “went out to the threshing floor (גורן) and his dog and his donkey were with him, he loaded his donkey with five Se’in (measures) and his dog with two. The dog was panting (breathing heavily). He moved one measure and it was panting, both of them and it was still panting. He said to the dog: You are not carrying a load, and you are panting! Likewise, even the seven commandments that Noah’s sons accepted they could not abide by them, they stood and put them on Israel.”

This parable is given in the context of forbidden foods, but it deals with mitzvot in general, and more precisely – with the burden of mitzvot. The dog in the parable represents the Gentiles, the donkey, Israel. On one hand, it seems unfair: the thresher owner puts a heavy weight on the donkey and a little weight on the dog, and the dog is unable to carry even the little that is placed on him. Not only that – even without a burden at all he has difficulty functioning. On the other hand, a dog is not an animal for carrying things, and one shouldn’t expect it to withstand this burden. The message of the parable sees mitzvot, including eating restrictions, as a burden not meant for everyone. The people of Israel have the ability to take upon themselves the burden of the commandments, the Gentiles simply do not have such an ability.

The second parable is told by R. Tanhum bar Hanilai, about “A doctor who comes to visit two patients, one has the potential for life and one has no chance to live. To the one who has the potential for life he ordered that such and such a thing he should not eat, and regarding the one without a chance to live he said: all he asks, give it to him. Likewise, the nations of the world, who are not for the life of the world to come, like grass I have given you everything (Genesis 9), but Israel, who are for the life of the world to come, “This is the animal that you will eat” (Leviticus 11).

This parable offers another explanation for the inequality: the eating restrictions are meant for our benefit, like a doctor’s instructions are meant to keep the patient healthy. What appears to be an advantage of the Gentiles – they are allowed to eat anything – is nothing but a disadvantage, since the lack of restrictions indicates the terminal condition of the patient, there is no point in

helping him.

There is also a third explanation, which offers a completely different direction. It appears in Midrash Tanhuma: God is innocent in his ways (2 Sam. 22), because all of God's ways are innocent, what does God care if we slaughter an animal and eat it or if we kill it in some other way... or what does He care between eating unclean foods and eating pure ones... The mitzvot were not given but to refine the creatures in them, as it is said: The word of the Lord is pure (ibid.).

According to this midrash, the eating prohibitions are intended to test and to refine humanity. God doesn't really care if we eat one animal or another. The restriction is not meant to preserve our health. The prohibition itself, the setting of the limits, is the purpose.

The mitzvot, the Jewish system of laws, are a means and not an end in itself. We do not avoid eating pork because it is harmful or unhealthy, but because we are Jews. It is part of our self-definition. We choose to take upon ourselves the burden of the commandments believing that this is God's will, and not thinking that we are better than other peoples or that the commandments are beneficial to us.

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Yahrtzeits

Shari Mevorah remembers her father Synek Kirstein on Tuesday April 9th.

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her brother Stuart Edelman on Tuesday April 9th.

Peter Greene remembers his father Stanley Greene on Wednesday April 10th.

