

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Shmini 5784

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The Torah teaches about kosher animals.

וְכָל עוֹף הָעוֹף אֲשֶׁר-לּוֹ אַרְבַּע רַגְלַיִם שֶׁקַּץ הוּא לָכֶם:

“And every winged creature that has four legs, is an abomination for you.” (Vayikra 11:23).

At first blush one is hard pressed to name any animal that has four legs and wings. Insects have six legs. Even locusts, that the Torah says have four legs in the previous pasuk and are kosher, really have six legs. What does the Torah refer to here?

Initially, it is important to remember that the Torah is not a science book. It does not conform to contemporary science in the following way. While it obviously conforms to established scientific principles (heliocentric universe, gravity), science is not fully at its peak of truth yet. For example, (open minded) scientists are revisiting the age of the earth realizing the holes in using carbon dating that far back and finding fossils of ancient creatures in the same strata as more current creature fossils. Further, and more simply, the Torah does not use the same scientific labeling. For example, modern science differentiates sea-life by mammals, fish, and crustaceans. The Torah considers every animal that lives in the sea a fish. (Bereishis 1:26). Likewise, while the bat in modern science is a mammal, the Torah considers it a bird because it is a winged-flying animal. (Vayikra 11:19).

Likewise, the word עוֹף includes all animals that crawl on the ground. This umbrella group includes insects, arachnoids, invertebrates, rodents, out-of-sea crustaceans, and likely, birds that do not fly. The Torah does not name many of the non-flying birds (penguins and emus) as non-kosher. They are included, instead, in this category. The Torah must be read by its own classifications and not by modern science's.

Additionally, the previous pesukim give context as to what these winged and four legged creatures may be. The category begins with, כָּל עוֹף הָעוֹף הַהֹלֵךְ עַל-אַרְבַּע שֶׁקַּץ הוּא לָכֶם: “Every winged creature that walks on four legs, it is an abomination to you.” (Ibid 11:20). While our pasuk says “that has four legs” this pasuk says, that walks on four legs. The difference is in two cases. First, perhaps some of the “legs” are not legs at all but are arms. Second, if the animal loses two of its legs and now functions perfectly well on four legs. It “walks on four legs” means it functions on four legs, despite missing two. This plays out in the next couple of pesukim that allow the eating of grasshoppers and locusts. (Ibid 11:21-22). Locusts and grasshoppers all have six legs. The six legs are the modern scientific terms. However, according to the Torah, they really function on four legs. They hop on their powerful hindlegs and balance on their middle legs. The forelegs are really arms used to grab food, dig, and clean its face. According to the Torah, locusts walk on

four legs and are winged. Therefore, the Torah means that certain winged-insects like crickets that function similarly, despite having six legs, are in the category of pasuk 11:20.

The problem with this is both in looks and in our pasuk. In looks, the only other creature really similar to the kosher grasshoppers and locusts are the non-kosher locusts and grasshoppers. When looking at a grasshopper, it appears to only have four legs. The powerful hindlegs, unless when jumping, tuck in and make it appear there are only four legs. One can mistake them thinking they have only four legs. Even upon further examination, they function with using only four legs to walk. This is true of all grasshoppers, kosher or unkosher. However, with crickets, their powerful jumper legs are always obvious as being a third pair. If the Torah really just meant winged insects that “walk on four” then it should have just done similar to the birds; it should have named the kosher ones and stated all other were abominations.

Our pasuk also is a problem. It does not say “walks on four” but has four legs. It also says, “every.” Meaning, every winged creature that has four legs is an abomination. Grasshoppers really have six legs and the Torah accounted for them. It is not “appears to have four legs” but actually does. There has to be animals that have only four legs and wings. Also, they have to be functioning wings because we already stated that birds that have wings but do not fly are in the category of “sheretz.”

There are animals that fit this category. There is the Draco lizard and the flying squirrel who both have a set of wings between its four legs. These both fit very well with “winged” and “sheretz” categories. There is also the *tannin* or sea monster. “And the Lord created the great sea monsters and all living things that swarm and creep in the waters.” (Bereishis 1:21). Clearly, the Torah is delineating between these sea monsters and other sea life. Further, Aharon summons it up by turning his staff into one such sea monster before Pharaoh. (Shmos 7:9). In Tehillim it differentiates between these monsters that are driven back into the sea (Tehillim 74:13) and the *levyason* that lives only in the ocean (ibid 74:14). The exact description is unknown, it may have had (has) wings. There is also the creature that Daniel describes being like a leopard with wings. (Daniel 7:6). That could have been a mystical creature of a dream but also could be describing something real.

There is also the possibility of extinct animals. Modern science posits that dinosaurs had wings. Given the faults in carbon dating, and in finding dino fossils in modern strata, it very well can be that soon paleontologists may discover that dinosaurs went extinct a lot more recently. Many dinosaurs can be described as four legged with wings. Dragons, a possible other name for dinosaur, is a creature found in cultures around the world. The most likely logical way that cultures from around the world share the same creature is if that creature actually existed. The fire-breathing part notwithstanding, the Mishneh acknowledges their existence. (Avodah Zorah 3:3). The griffin (a four-legged winged lion with an eagle’s head) is also found in many eastern and Mediterranean cultures. It, too, may have existed and gone extinct.

The Torah clearly refers to “all” winged animals that have four legs. It may be insects that the front legs were ripped off. It is more likely the flying lizard and flying squirrel. It also may be one of these mythical creatures that are really just extinct animals. Either way, if the Torah mentions such an animal, then they had to exist.