

Parshat Shemini

Proper Speech

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In Parshat Shemini, the Torah teaches us about the laws of kosher and non kosher animals. The Vilna Gaon asks: why does the Torah refer to non Kosher animals as “tameh,” “impure” where as in Parshat Noach, the Torah refers to them as “not pure,” “not tahor?” The Gemara in Pesachim explains that the Torah goes out of the way to use extra words in order to speak in a cleaner language. Why doesn't the Torah use a more clean language when referring to non Kosher animals? The answer is because when one teaches another about kosher and non kosher animals, one has to be direct and explain that it is “Tameh” meaning that one cannot eat it because the Torah commanded this to us. In Parshat Noach, the Torah was giving historical facts so the Torah did not have to be so direct. The Parsha is teaching us a vital lesson on how one is supposed to speak to another. The Gemara in Yevamot teaches that we mourn during the period between Pesach and Shavuot because the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished at one time. Even though they were great Torah scholars, they died because they did not respect one another. One of the ways to respect one another is to use proper speech. Even when one has to be firm with his or her fellow, he or she should use proper speech as a way of respect.