

The Kosher Host
Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

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Parshat Sh'mini

You shall not eat the camel, . . . although it chews the cud, because it does not divide the hoof, nor the pig, . . . although it divides the hoof, because it does not chew the cud. (Leviticus 11:4-7)

Our master and teacher Rebbe Meir of Premislau teaches that a host must ensure that any guests at his or her table be comfortable. The rules of kosher mammals, he says, tell us what the host must do to put guests at ease.

Rebbe Meir interprets the Hebrew word *parsa* (*hoof*) as also denoting a slice of bread. As the kosher animal **divides the hoof**, he says, a host must divide the bread, must cut several slices from the loaf of bread at the table, lest guests be too embarrassed to do so themselves. That is, the host must assure that there is enough food and that the food is presented in appropriate portions; s/he is responsible for serving the guests.

Chewing the cud, Rebbe Meir then says, means eating heartily. A host must eat heartily when there are guests at the table, even if s/he would not ordinarily do so. Why? So that a guest will feel encouraged to eat to his or her full capacity.

One who fails to present plenty of food, in appropriate portions, is like the camel, which, although it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof.

One who fails to eat heartily, who does not encourage guests to eat freely, is like the pig, which, although it has a cloven hoof, does not chew the cud.

Only a host who both splits the hoof (slices plenty of bread) and chews the cud (eats well, to encourage the guests to do the same) is truly kosher.

Shabbat Shalom.