

REPRINTED FROM

**RABBI WEIN'S
WEEKLY
BLOG**

This week's Torah reading contains both narrative history and dogmatic Jewish halacha. It relates to us the tragic story of the deaths of the two older sons of Aharon when they apparently willfully mishandled the obligatory incense offering in the Mishkan/Tabernacle. The Torah reading also details for us the list of animals, birds and fish that may be consumed by Jews in accordance with the laws of dietary kashrut. At first and cursory glance, there seems to be no connection between these two disparate subjects dealt with in this week's Torah reading. Yet we are certainly aware that Torah has to be understood and studied on many different levels and that the Torah is not subject to completely haphazard arrangements of its prose and content matter. So at some deeper, below the surface level, there may be a connection between these two subject matters that find themselves lumped together in one section of the Torah. Without stretching our creative curiosity too far, I think that such a connection can be made regarding the death of the two sons of Aharon and the laws of kashrut that justify their proximity of appearance in the one parsha of this week's Torah reading. And that connection is that obeying or disobeying God's instructions in matters of Jewish ritual holiness carries unforeseen consequences with it. Just as is the case in the physical world

touching a live electric wire no matter how noble one's intentions may be for so doing will produce injury and even death to one so doing, so too in the spiritual world of holiness and sanctification there are lethal consequences to behavior that deviates from the express statements of the Torah. And all of Jewish history bears out the truth of this simple statement.

The Talmud states that consuming non-kosher food stops up the hearts of otherwise good Jews. Non-kosher food apparently is a spiritual form of bad cholesterol. It hardens one's heart and makes one less charitable or forgiving. This is a consequence of disobeying God's commandment to Israel to be a holy nation, separate from all others. Just as there were terrible consequences for the sons of Aharon for substituting their judgment over God's commandment, so too is this the case in all other matters of Torah law as well. There are really no rationally accurate reasons that can be advanced for the dietary laws of the Jews. It is all involved in a purely unseen spiritual realm. But that does not in any way minimize the real effects and consequences that observance or non-observance of these laws carry with them. All of Jewish history testifies to the corollary effects of kashrut observance on all facets of Jewish life and survival. Essentially put, the Torah tells us that the Jewish people are what they eat. Medical science has proven this to be true physically. The Torah comes to add to this the spiritual element, which is certainly no less important and vital for Jewish life to survive and prosper. ♣