

“Let them Eat Meat?”

A Torah Perspective on Vegetarianism

sources: Hebrewbooks.org, Mechon-mamre.org

Source #1: Sanhedrin 59b

°את בריתי הפר ילרבות בני קטורה אמר רב יהודה אמר רב אדם הראשון לא הותר לו בשר לאכילה דכתיב °לכם יהיה לאכלה ולכל חית הארץ ולא חית הארץ לכם וכשבאו בני נח התיר להם שנאמר °כירק עשב נתתי לכם את כל יכול לא יהא אבר מן החי נוהג בו ת"ל °אך בשר בנפשו דמו

Rabbi Judah stated in the name of Rav: "Adam was not permitted meat for purposes of eating as it is written, 'for you shall it be for food and to all beasts of the earth' (Genesis 1:29), but not beasts of the earth for you. But when the sons of Noah came, [God] permitted them [the beasts of the earth] as it is said, '**as the green grass have I given to you everything**' (Genesis 9:3)."

- *What does the allowance of meat consumption to Noah, following the flood suggest?*

- *Which model should we be striving for – that of Noah or Adam?*

Source #2

Other views: Tur (Rabbi Jacob ben Asher) Genesis 1:29, explains that prior to partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, **Adam lacked any desire for meat; only subsequent to eating of the forbidden fruit did man acquire a carnivorous nature.** The dispensation granted to Noah to eat the flesh of animals simply reflects man's transformed biological needs.

Rabbi Meir Leibush – “Malbim” Genesis 9:3: **Adam was endowed with a "strong" constitution and that the produce available in the Garden of Eden was nutritionally optimal in nature.** Under such circumstances, Adam's dietary needs could be satisfied without recourse to meat. Only as mankind degenerated physically as well as spiritually, became geographically dispersed and hence subject to the vagaries of climate, and as the quality of available produce became nutritionally inferior, did it become necessary for man in his "weakened" state to supplement his diet with animal products

Source #3a) Pesachim 49b

תניא ר' אומר עם הארץ אסור לאכול בשר
(בהמה) שנאמר °זאת תורת הבהמה והעוף
כל העוסק בתורה מותר לאכול בשר בהמה
ועוף וכל שאינו עוסק בתורה אסור לאכול
בשר בהמה ועוף : אמר רבי אלעזר עם הארץ

"This is the law of the animal... and the fowl' (Leviticus 11:46): whoever engages in [the study of] the Law is permitted to eat the flesh of animals and fowl, but whoever does not engage in [the study of] the Law may not eat the flesh of animals and fowl."

3b) Maharsha – Commentary on Maseches Pesachim

לחילול בשר גגון דם וחלב ובשר וחלב וניד הגסה הותר לאכול בשר וכל שאינו עוסק בתורה בכל הני
איסור והיתר דלחילול בשר אסור לאכול בשר דודאי יוכל בו להחייב האיסור ועל כן נקט בשר בהמה
ועוף דבני דניהם להבדיל בין איסור להיתר משליכ ביניהם דבכל יוכל להבדיל בין איסור להיתר כשידע
מי השגהם יחוד וכלל בתורה לטמא כ"ה כו' לבלתי האה רחוק מן השכל דאפי' בעלי חיים המויכחין

This text reflects a concern for scrupulous observance of the minutiae of the dietary code. The ignoramus is not proficient in the myriad rules and regulations governing the eating of meat, including the differentiation between kosher and non-kosher species, the porging of forbidden fat and veins, the soaking and salting of meat, etc. **Only the scholar who has mastered those rules and regulations can eat meat with a clear conscience.**

Rabbenu Nissim: explains that an ignoramus is advised to refrain from eating meat because he is ignorant of the proper method of performing ritual slaughter and of examining the internal organs.

3c) Abarbanel, Albo:

Vegetarianism is a moral ideal only in the following sense: The slaughter of animals might cause the individual who performs such acts to develop negative character traits, viz., meanness and cruelty.

Also, see the following excerpt featuring the view of Ramban:

”כִּי יִקְרָא קֵן צֶפּוּר לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּכָל עֵץ אוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ אֶפְרָחִים אוֹ בְיָצִים וְהָאֵם רֹבֶצֶת עַל הָאֶפְרָחִים אוֹ עַל הַבְּיָצִים לֹא תִקַּח הָאֵם עַל הַבְּנִים: שְׁלַח תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת הָאֵם וְאֶת הַבְּנִים תִּקַּח לָךְ לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ וְהָאֶרֶץ יִמִּים.”

מסביר הרמב"ן: "גם זו מצוה מבוארת מן 'אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד' -- כי הטעם בשניהם לבלתי היות לנו לב אכזרי ולא נרחם". המצוה היא על מנת לחנך אותנו שלא נהיה אכזריים, בדומה למצות "אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד

The conflict of Kayin and Hevel – as it applies to Vegetarianism

Source #4: Bereishis The Story of Cain and Abel:

2. And she continued to bear his brother Abel, and Abel was a shepherd of flocks, and Cain was a tiller of the soil. 3. Now it came to pass at the end of days, that Cain brought of the fruit of the soil an offering to the Lord. 4. And Abel he too brought of the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest, and the Lord turned to Abel and to his offering. 5. But to Cain and to his offering He did not turn, and it annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell. 6. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? 7. Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you? If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it." 8. And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. 9. And the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10. And He said, "What have you done? Hark! Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the earth. 11. And now, you are cursed even more than the ground, which opened its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. 12. When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you; you shall be a wanderer and an exile in the land." 13. And Cain said to the Lord, "Is my iniquity too great to bear? 14. Behold You have driven me today off the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from before You, and I will be a wanderer and an exile in the land, and it will be that whoever finds me will kill me." 15. And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain

Source #5: Rabbi Yosef Albo – Sefer Ha'ikarim:

1) Cain did not offer an animal sacrifice because he regarded men and animals as equals and, accordingly, felt that he had no right to take the life of an animal, even as an act of divine worship. Abel maintained that man was superior to animals in that he possessed reason, as demonstrated in his ability to use his intellect in cultivating fields and in shepherding flocks. *This, Abel believed, gave man limited rights over animals, including the right to use animals in the service of God, but did not confer upon him the right to kill animals for his own needs.*

2) Cain failed to understand the reason for the rejection of his sacrifice and continued to assume that his own value system was correct, but that, in the eyes of God, animal sacrifice was intrinsically superior to the offering of produce. Since Cain remained confirmed in his opinion that man and animals are inherently equal, he was led to the even more grievous conclusion that just as man is entitled to take the life of an animal, so also is he entitled to take the life of his fellow man.

This position, Albo asserts, was adopted by succeeding generations as well, and it was precisely the notion that men and animals are equal that led, not to the renunciation of causing harm to animals and to concern for their welfare, but rather, to the notion that violence against one's fellow man was equally acceptable.

Source #6: The verses right before Parshas Noach:

Why was meat permitted to Noach?

כא ויגוע כל-בְּשָׂר הָרִמָּשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, בְּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבַחַיָּה, וּבְכָל-הַשָּׂרָץ, הַשָּׂרָץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ--וְכָל, הָאָדָם. כב פֶּלֶאֱשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת-רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפָּיו, מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְבָּה--מָתוּ. כג וַיִּמַח אֶת-כָּל-הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה, מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וַיִּמְחוּ, מִן-הָאָרֶץ; וַיִּשְׁאַר אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת אֵתוֹ, בַּתֵּבָה.

21 And all flesh perished that moved upon the earth, both fowl, and cattle, and beast, and every swarming thing that swarmeth upon the earth, and every man; **22** all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, whatsoever was in the dry land, died. **23** And He blotted out every living substance which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and creeping thing, and fowl of the heaven; and they were blotted out from the earth; and Noah only was left, and they that were with him in the ark.

Source #7a): Sanhedrin 108a

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת כָּל הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר עָל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ אִם אָדָם הָמָא בְּהֵמָה מָה הַמָּאָה תְּנָא מִשּׁוּם רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן קָרְחָה מִשָּׁל לְאָדָם שְׁעִישָׁה הוּפָה לְבָנוּ וְהִתְקִין מִבֵּל מִיָּנִי סְעוּדָה לַיָּמִים מִתּ בְּנֵי עָמֹד (וּבְלָבָל) [וּפֹרֵר] אֶת הַזּוּפְתָו אָמַר כְּלוּם עִשְׂתִּי אֵלָא בִשְׁבִיל בְּנֵי עִכְשָׁיו שָׂמַת הוּפָה לָמָּה לִי אִף הַקֶּב"ה אָמַר כְּלוּם בְּרָאֲתִי בְּהֵמָה וְחַיָּה אֵלָא בִשְׁבִיל אָדָם שְׁאָדָם הוּמָא בְּהֵמָה וְחַיָּה לָמָּה לִי מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בִּדְרַכָּה מֵתוּ *וְלֹא דְנִים שְׂבִיבִים דְּרִישׁ ר' *

"If man sinned, what was the sin of the animals? Rabbi Joshua the son of Korchah answered the question with a parable: A man made a nuptial canopy for his son and prepared elaborate foods for the wedding feast. In the interim his son died. The father arose and took apart the nuptial canopy declaring, 'I did nothing other than on behalf of my son. Now that he has died, for what purpose do I need the nuptial canopy?' Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I did not create animals and beasts other than for man. Now that man has sinned, for what purpose do I need animals and beasts?'"

7b) Rabbi Bleich:No further demonstration of the relative status of man and beasts was necessary. **Permission to eat the flesh of animals was then required only as a means of explicitly negating the residual notion that animals are somehow endowed with rights, and that man's obligations vis-a-vis animals are rooted in such rights, rather than in a concern for the possible moral degeneration of man himself...**

Source #8: CNN: Group blasts PETA 'Holocaust' project Friday, February 28, 2003 Posted: 1:43 PM EST (1843 GMT)

(CNN) -- The Anti-Defamation League has denounced a campaign by an animal rights group that compares slaughtering animals to the murder of 6 million Jews in World War II.

The graphic campaign and exhibit "Holocaust on Your Plate," devised by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, juxtaposes 60-square-foot panels displaying gruesome scenes from Nazi death camps side by side with disturbing photographs from factory farms and slaughterhouses. One shows a starving man in a concentration camp next to a starving cow.

The exhibit opens Friday in San Diego, California, and went up Thursday at the University of California at Los Angeles. It also is posted on a PETA Web site, www.masskilling.com, which calls for support for the campaign from the Jewish community.

The comparisons prompted an angry statement from Abraham Foxman, Anti-Defamation League national director and a Holocaust survivor.

"The effort by PETA to compare the deliberate, systematic murder of millions of Jews to the issue of animal rights is abhorrent," the statement said. "PETA's effort to seek approval for their 'Holocaust on Your Plate' campaign is outrageous, offensive and takeschutzpah to new heights."

Source #9:

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. regards man's moral state in that period as being akin to that of Adam before his sin and does indeed view renunciation of enjoyment of animal flesh as part of the heightened moral awareness which will be manifest at that time.

(A) Addressing himself to members of the vegetarian movement, Rabbi Kook remarks almost facetiously that one might surmise that all problems of human welfare have been resolved and the sole remaining area of concern is animal welfare. In effect, his argument is that there ought to be a proper ordering of priorities. Rabbi Kook is quite explicit in stating that enmity between nations and racial discrimination should be of greater moral concern to mankind than the well-being of animals and that only when such matters have been rectified should attention be turned to questions of animal welfare.

(B) Given the present nature of the human condition, maintains Rabbi Kook, it is impossible for man to sublimate his desire for meat. The inevitable result of promoting vegetarianism as a normative standard of human conduct, argues Rabbi Kook, will be that man will violate this norm in seeking self-gratification. Once taking the life of animals is regarded as being equal in abhorrence to taking the life of man, it will transpire, contends Rabbi Kook, that in his pursuit of meat, man will regard cannibalism as no more heinous than the consumption of the flesh of animals. The result will be, not enhanced respect for the life of animals, but rather debasement of human life.

(C) Man was granted dominion over animals, including the right to take their lives for man's own benefit, in order to impress upon him his spiritual superiority and heightened moral obligations. Were man to accord animals the same rights he accords fellow human beings, he would rapidly degenerate to the level of animals in assuming that he is bound by standards of morality no different from those espoused by brute animals.

(D) In an insightful psychological observation, Rabbi Kook remarks that even individuals who are morally degenerate seek to channel their natural moral instincts in some direction. Frequently, they seek to give expression to moral drives by becoming particularly scrupulous with regard to some specific aspect of moral behavior. With almost prescient knowledge of future events, Rabbi Kook argues that, were vegetarianism to become the norm, people might become quite callous with regard to human welfare and human life, and express their instinctive moral feelings in an exaggerated concern for animal welfare.