



Do We Have to Eat Meat on Pesach?

Reducing Animals to Beef Stew and Schnitzel

Almost every *Ba'alei Teshuva* (returnee to Judaism) has been vegetarian at one time or another. We are greatly bothered, even abhorred by the way animals are treated and made to suffer by the hands of the meat industry. Stuffing numerous pecking chickens in small cages, without room to flap their wings or breathe fresh air is inhumane, and so is keeping cattle in musty, dim pens without a chance to forage for juicy herbs or wag their tail in the sun. In fact, since 1900, it has been a practice for many dairy producers to cut off – or dock – their cows' tails to avoid getting hit in the face by a dirty tail with manure. Since the poor and crowded conditions are breeding grounds for various bacteria, the animals receive multiple antibiotic injections as well as growth hormones and other 'medicine' that will increase their mass and therefore, their commercial value. Reducing animals to becoming rib steaks, schnitzel, beef stew, pot-roast, milk and egg producers for human consumption, without caring about their living conditions, seems to go against the Torah command which forbids causing unnecessary suffering to animals (*tza'ar ba'alei chaim*) as explained in *Babylonian Talmud Baba Metzia* 32b. According to Rabbi Yosef Albo, killing of animals is a cruel and furious act, ingraining these negative traits in the human character; in addition, the meat of certain animals coarsens the heart and deadens its spiritual sensitivity (*Sefer ha-Ikkarim –The Book of Principles, Article Three, Chapter 15*). What, then, gives humans the merit to take the life of another being? Where is the respect for life and for Hashem's creations?

The Spiritual Awareness of Animals During Temple Times

When I first landed in Diaspora Yeshiva in the spring of 1980, the vegetarian students were explained that the animals would stretch out their neck to be sacrificed on the altar in the Temple. They desired to be offered up because they knew that it was an elevation for their soul. If this is true, the animals demonstrated an extremely high level of consciousness. Understanding secrets about soul elevation and being willing to sacrifice one's life for Hashem supersedes the spiritual awareness of most people today. How can we then munch up such spiritual beings for our own gluttonous pleasure? Actually, we cannot, as the Torah does not permit eating meat, unless, we are going to use its energy for Torah: "The unlearned may not eat meat as it states, 'This is the Torah concerning animals and birds' (*Vayikra* 11:46). Whoever is involved in Torah is permitted to eat meat and chicken but whoever is not involved in Torah is prohibited from eating meat and chicken" (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim* 49b).

Are We Aware of Who We Eat When Eating Meat?

Living close to nature and having a relationship with animals engenders an awareness of the preciousness of all living beings. Eating the meat of animals that we raised ourselves is a spiritual experience, which many shun. My neighbor kept two male goats who were constantly and unhappily bleating. When she had one of them slaughtered and got the remaining buck a female, his bleating subsided. Yet, my neighbor couldn't get herself to eat the goat meat of the animal that she had tended and remembered fondly. One of my students, Laura, once told us about her experience taking a 5-year-old child, Sarah, who lived in the city, to the zoo. Sarah oohed and aahed at the colorful chickens there. When Laura explained to Sarah that the main course for their last Friday night dinner was chicken just like these, Sarah wouldn't believe it. "No no," she said, "what we had for dinner never ran around and cackled. It was frozen packages that my mother bought in the supermarket." This estrangement from the realization that of what we are eating is accentuated by the separate words in Hebrew: for a live chicken – תַּרְנֶגֶל/*tarnegolet*

and for a ready to cook or cooked chicken – עוף/of. My husband and I raise home scale chickens mainly for eggs. Every year, we have extra roosters who fight and could kill each other if left in the cage together. It is, therefore, a service to the fowl to remove the extra rooster. Since most chicken owners don't need additional roosters, the natural thing is to have the extra roosters taken care of by our local, ritual slaughterer. I recall the first time when, with great awe, I served our organic rooster for Shabbat. We remembered the rooster with every delicious bite and did our best to channel its energy into *Oneg Shabbat* (the mitzvah of Shabbat enjoyment) and words of Torah.

Does the Torah Permit Vegetarianism?

[Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin](#): Holistic Torah for Women on the Land attracts many vegetarian students. These sensitive, caring, spiritual seekers, who endeavor to live in harmony with nature, do not want to infringe upon the animal kingdom. In a Jewish environment, where chicken or meat, prepared one way or another, is typically the centerpiece of the Shabbat, holiday and wedding table, the question arises whether it is desirable or even permitted to be vegetarian according to the Torah. I remember back in my early *ba'al teshuva* days that we were told that everyone had to eat meat at least once a year on Pesach, as it states in *Parashat Bo*:

ספר שמות פרק יב פסוק ח וְאָכְלוּ חֵם אֶת הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מְרָרִים יֹאכְלוּהוּ:

“On this night, they shall eat the flesh, roasted over the fire, and unleavened cakes; with bitter herbs they shall eat it (*Shemot* 12:8).

Today, without our Holy Temple, we are not permitted to eat broiled or roasted meat or chicken on the Pesach Seder night (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 476:2). This is in order not to appear as though we are eating sanctified meat outside of the Temple. It is the practice to roast a shank bone, the day before Pesach, and place it on the Seder plate, to commemorate the Pesach sacrifice (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 473). Nowadays, people often use a chicken wing or neck. According to Rambam, this roasted meat of the Seder plate may not be eaten on the Seder night itself (*Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah* 8:11). The actual commandment to eat meat on Pesach pertains specifically to Temple times:

רמב"ם יד החזקה הלכות קרבן פסח פרק ח (א) אכילת בשר הפסח בליל חמשה עשר מצות עשה שנאמר ואכלו את הבשר בלילה הזה צלי אש ומצות על מרורים יאכלוהו: (ג) ואם לא אכל אלא כזית יצא ידי חובתו וכן אכילת בשר פסח שני בליל חמשה עשר לחדש אייר מצות עשה שנאמר בו על מצות ומרורים יאכלוהו: Partaking of the meat of the Pesach sacrifice on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan is a positive commandment, as it states: “You shall eat the meat on this night, roasted on the fire. With *matzot* and bitter herbs shall you eat it...” (*Shemot* 12:8). Even if one does not eat more than an olive-size portion, he fulfills his obligation. Similarly, partaking of the second Pesach sacrifice on the fifteenth of the month of Iyar is a positive commandment, as stated: “Eat it with *matzot* and bitter herbs” (*Bamidbar* 9:11); (Rambam, *Hilchot Korban Pesach* 8:1,3).

Until the Temple is rebuilt, may it be soon, it is not an obligation to eat meat- even on Pesach. Contrary to what I misunderstood, as a new *ba'alat teshuva*, Jews are not required to eat meat at the Pesach Seder or any other time. “Our Rabbis taught: A man is obligated to make his children and his household rejoice on the holidays... How does a man make them rejoice? ... When the Temple was in existence there could be no rejoicing except with meat and wine... But now that the Temple is no longer in existence, there is no rejoicing save with wine...” (*Babylonian Talmud Pesachim* 109a).

The Beit Yosef expresses surprise that despite this conclusion in *Talmud Pesachim* Rambam includes the requirement of eating meat for rejoicing in the holiday (*Hilchot Yom Tov* 6:18); (Beit Yosef, *Orach Chaim* 529). Rabbi Yosef Karo accordingly rules the halacha of rejoicing on the holidays without reference to the obligation to eat meat (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 529:2). Thus, today there is no obligation to eat meat in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *simchat Yom Tov* (rejoicing on the holidays).

Will Animal Sacrifices be Reinstated?

The question remains, will we be obligated to become carnivores when the Third Temple is rebuilt? (May it be soon!). The answer to this question depends upon whether animal sacrifices will be reinstated during Temple times. If so, then we have a Torah commandment to partake in the Pesach sacrifice (*Shemot* 12:8). In his commentary on the end of the *Shemone Esrei*, "Then shall the offering of Yehuda and Jerusalem be pleasant to Hashem as in the days of old and as in the ancient years" (*Malachi* 3:4), Rav Kook wrote: "In the future, the abundance of knowledge will spread to and penetrate even animals... and the sacrifices, which will then be from grain, will be as pleasing to G-d as in days of old [when there were animal sacrifices]..." (*Olat Reiyah*, vol. 1 p. 292). This view coincides with Rav Kook's description of the rarified world at the end of days when the human moral condition will abhor [eating] the flesh of animals, because of the moral loathing inherent in that act. Then you surely will not have the urge to eat meat, and you will not eat it (*The Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace* 4). Without doubt, Rav Kook held that when the world will reach its final perfection, humanity will return to G-d's original plan to be herbivorous. Although, in our pre-messianic time, we experience a movement towards the return to the vegetarianism of the first human beings in the Garden, there is a dispute among modern commentaries whether according to Rav Kook animal sacrifices will be reinstated during Third Temple times. Rav Kook's vision of the ultimate perfected ideal world, with only vegetarian sacrifices, may possibly be referring to a far distant future, following Third Temple times and *techiyat hameitim* (the resurrection), when the nature of the world will change, and animals will be on a human level. Then, no sacrifices will be brought from these highly conscious beings. At that time, the Torah dealing with *korbanot* will be interpreted on a mystical inner level (Rabbi Simcha Paltrovitch (d. 1926; *Simchat Avot* 7-8). So it is still possible that Rav Kook did agree that animal sacrifices would be reinstated during Third Temple times [Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivotofsky](#).

Channeling the Vitality of the Animal into Divine Service

In conclusion, whether we are vegetarian or not, we must ingrain a heightened respect for Hashem's creatures, and do our very best to avoid eating animals that were raised in cages or crates, without having the ability to stretch their legs. Moreover, let us work on refraining from eating any created being in a gluttonous way. Since eating meat is not necessary for survival, and can cause a more materialistic and coarser nature, let us only eat meat when we will be able to accomplish more with the meat than we would be able to with vegetation. Arizal explains that the sacrifices were a way of elevating the matter and vitality of this world to a higher plane (*Arba Meot Shekel Kesef* p. 57). Similarly, on a smaller scale, any mitzvah we do elevates some aspect of the material world. Thus, before biting into that scrumptious flesh, let us recognize that the meat on our dinner plate was once a living creature with emotions and consciousness. Let us be mindful that the life of the animal was taken in order that we raise up its sparks through channeling its energy into Divine service.