

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT NOACH**

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**The Allowance Granted to Noach and His Descendants to Eat Meat**

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**I. The Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace**

Together with the *mitzvot* that are given to Noach and his descendants in this week's *parasha*, they are also allowed to eat meat, something that had not been permitted to the earlier generations prior to the flood. Adam and Chava are instructed as follows:

And God said: "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for food; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creeps upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food." (*Bereishit* 1:29-30)

However, after the flood, Noach is told:

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all wherewith the ground teems, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be for food for you; as the green herb have I given you all. (*Bereishit* 9:23-24)

According to the plain sense of the biblical text, both people and animals were originally vegetarians. It is not clear how this can be reconciled with the biological properties and structure of the ingestive and digestive organs of the animals known to us today as carnivores (as well as with the internal structure of some of the dinosaurs). Perhaps these animals were permitted to eat the carcasses of dead animals, but they were forbidden to kill animals for the purpose of eating them. It is also possible that the answer lies in biological data not in our possession.

Either way, refraining from killing animals for the purpose of eating while eating the meat of animal carcasses reduces pollution in the world and allows for improved cyclicality in nature. Thus, it is explicitly stated in the vision of the End of Days:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (*Yeshayahu* 11:6-7)

Rambam (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:1) sees in this vision a total change of the natural order, and therefore asserts that this verse is "a metaphor and a parable" for the fact that the nations of the world "will all return to the true faith." In contrast to Rambam, Ra'avad argues ad loc. that the verses may be understood in their

plain sense, and that the future will bring changes in the laws of nature as we know them.

In any event, in the aftermath of the flood, God permits man to eat animal meat, perhaps because all of the vegetation has been destroyed in the flood; in the first years, there is nothing left for man to eat other than animal meat. Ramban sees this allowance as both regression and also progress:

And when they sinned, and all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth, it was decreed that they would die in a flood. Because Noach saved of them in order to preserve the species, He granted an allowance to slaughter and eat them, because their entire existence was because of him. (Ramban, *Bereishit* 1:29)

The animals, for their part, corrupt their way upon the earth, and therefore it is permitted to kill them; certain humans save the entire universe with their good deeds, and therefore they are permitted to eat meat.

On the face of it, this view is puzzling: Can it be that because Noach saves the world's animals in the one-time event of the flood that man is permitted to eat animal meat for all generations? Perhaps Ramban's words can be understood as follows: After all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth, and animals began to devour other animals even before they die, the domesticated animals and birds are left defenseless. Man accepts upon himself the role of Noach, bringing the cows, sheep, goats and certain domesticated birds inside buildings erected on his property. He feeds them and protects them from predators, from the cold and from disease. This is what Noach does in the Ark. However, for the privilege of this protection, the animals have to pay a price, and therefore their meat is permitted to their human protectors. Man will not protect animals if he is not permitted to eat them himself. However, even when he eats them, he must regulate the manner in which the animal is killed for this purpose; he must slaughter it in a way that prevents the suffering that it would experience if preyed upon by a stronger animal. In this way, he will also prevent its extinction.

In contrast to Ramban, Rav Kook (in his essay, "The Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace") sees the introduction of animals into the food chain only as a regression. According to him, the eating of meat is permitted only to appease man's evil inclination. Man's urges had descended to the lowest level in connection with the sins of the sons of God in the generation of the flood (*Bereishit* 6:1-4), and were man not permitted to release his violent impulses against animals, he would take them out on the members of his own species and eat the flesh of human beings. On the other hand, if the difference between man and animal is not made clear to him, that animals are man's food, he is liable to mate with them and completely lose his human level. This poor state is temporary, until the vision of vegetarianism and peace is realized, and man returns to the level he enjoyed prior to the generation of the flood, when he was created by God.

**II. The Eating and Sacrificing of Meat**

Let us examine the allowance to eat meat from a different angle. Permission to eat meat is granted to Noach in close proximity to the sacrifice that he offers to God:

And Noach built an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-

offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled the sweet savor... (*Bereishit* 8:20-21)

This is immediately followed by Noah being told:

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all wherewith the ground teems, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be for food for you; as the green herb have I given you all. Only flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat. And surely for your blood of your lives will I demand an accounting; at the hand of every beast will I demand an accounting; and at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I demand an accounting for the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man. (*Bereishit* 9:2-6)

It seems that Noah is permitted to eat meat as "leftovers" of what he offers to God as a sacrifice, and that he eats meat "at God's table." While it is true that he is permitted to eat even non-sacrificial meat, this allowance is due to the allowance of sacrificial meat. Indeed, this is what we find in another place where the Torah relates to the eating of meat:

Speak unto Aharon, and unto his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them: This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying: "Whatever man there be of the house of Israel, that kills an ox, or lamb, or goat, in the camp, or that kills it without the camp, and has not brought it unto the door of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering unto the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, blood shall be imputed unto that man; he has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people. To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices, which they sacrifice in the open field, even that they may bring them unto the Lord, unto the door of the tent of meeting, unto the priest, and sacrifice them for sacrifices of peace-offerings unto the Lord. And the priest shall dash the blood against the altar of the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting, and make the fat smoke for a sweet savor unto the Lord." (*Vayikra* 17:2-6)

These verses, according to their plain sense, teach that the slaughtering of an animal for the purpose of eating its meat is forbidden as bloodshed, like a person killing his fellow man. At the same time, however, a person is permitted to offer a sacrifice; to place its blood, fat and sacrificial parts on God's altar; and then to eat the rest of the meat. That is to say, the allowance to eat meat applies only to meat eaten "at God's table."

This is also the way to explain the prohibition applying to the descendants of Noah against eating blood. The same passage in the Book of *Vayikra* says:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel: No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourns among you eat blood. And whatever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, that takes in hunting any beast or fowl that may be eaten, he shall pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust. For as to the life of all flesh, the blood thereof is all one with the life thereof;

therefore I said unto the children of Israel: You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof; whoever eats it shall be cut off. (*Vayikra* 17:11-14)

Blood is the main part of a sacrifice, and therefore it is not included in the allowance to eat meat.

It is possible that Hevel's offering from the firstborns of his flock and of their fat (*Bereishit* 4:4) is meant to permit the eating of meat, but Hevel is killed and the allowance dies with him. Noah renews the sacrifice of animals, and when he sprinkles their blood on the altar, their meat is permitted to be eaten.

Let us return to the *mitzvot* that Noah receives when he offers his sacrifice. As stated, eating the blood of life is forbidden to him, because the place of blood is on the altar. The life force is given to God, and the animal's flesh is then given to man. However, even this is subject to a clear reservation: all this applies only to animals, but the life of one's fellow man may not be taken in any situation, not even as a sacrifice to God. In other words, the juxtaposition of the allowance to eat meat to the prohibition of murder comes to outlaw human sacrifice in any form.<sup>1</sup> The life of one who is created in the image of God may not be taken for the purpose of an offering to God, as this only diminishes the image of God.

There is, however, a way for a person to pour his soul before God, and this too is in the place that the Lord will choose and in close proximity to the altar:

And Chana answered and said: "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the Lord." (*I Shemuel* 1:15)

Man pours out his soul to God in prayer, and his prayers correspond to the sacrifices. The members of the *ma'amad*, who represent the people of Israel in the Temple, are present at the time of the bringing of the daily offerings. They pray to God and pour out their hearts to Him at that time in close proximity to the offering of the sacrifices, which involves the pouring of the life of the offering, its blood, before God:

And you shall offer your burnt-offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the Lord your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out against the altar of the Lord your God, and you shall eat the flesh. (*Devarim* 12:27)

In conclusion, Rav Kook in his "Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace" deals also with the question of why the blood of undomesticated animals and birds is subject to the *mitzva* of covering the blood, whereas the blood of domesticated animals is not subject to that obligation. Rav Kook explains this in his moral manner: undomesticated beasts and birds are wild animals, and therefore man's moral right to eat of them is limited. Therefore, he must cover their blood and thus also cover his shame, as he slaughtered them for the purpose of his eating them. In contrast, man raises, protects, treats and feeds domesticated animals. Hence, he is permitted to eat of them and is not obligated to cover their blood.

According to this approach, there is another way to explain the difference between domesticated animals, on the one hand; and undomesticated animals and birds, on the other. Undomesticated

<sup>1</sup> Avraham certainly knew this at the time of the *Akeida*. We will deal with this issue in *Parashat Vaera*.

animals and birds are not fit for the altar; since their blood is not fit for the altar, it must be covered. On the other hand, the blood of domesticated animals is not covered, in order to warn against the very phenomenon of eating non-sacrificial meat. The Book of *Devarim* states:

Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water. (*Devarim* 12:16)

You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water. (*Devarim* 12:24)

In other words, eating an animal outside the framework of a sacrifice is nothing but bloodshed.<sup>2</sup> Its blood, which remains uncovered, serves as a reminder and a warning, thus filling man with shame for his lust.

Translated by David Strauss

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<sup>2</sup> This follows from the verse: "They have shed their blood like water round about Jerusalem, with none to bury them" (*Tehilim* 79:3) – shedding blood like water means murder.