

### Parshas Noach 5772

## VEGETARIANS VS. MEAT-EATERS

Last week's *parshah* detailed the dietary restrictions placed on Adam Harishon, whose menu options were confined to vegetarian dishes (*Bereishis* 1:29). As evidenced in this week's *parshah*, the situation changes in the post-Deluge world. Hashem tells Noach (*Ibid.* 9:3): "All living creatures... shall be to you for food; just like vegetable matter (that had been sanctioned for Adam), I have granted you all (i.e., even meat)."

What exactly precipitated this change in standard fare? Why could Noach and his progeny consume that which was off limits to previous generations all the way back to Adam? The commentators expound greatly to account for this sea change. They provide many informative ideas and profound insights in the process.

The Abarbanel sees the lifting of this ban as a practical matter. Upon emerging from the ark, Noach and his family were confronted with a world that had basically just undergone some serious pummeling. As such, there was no vegetation available as of yet, and much time would elapse before any crops would be ready for harvest. Quite simply, man had to eat *something* in the meantime; thus the vegetarian lifestyle was ushered into early retirement.

### JUST "DESSERTS"

Some of the Rishonim (medieval commentators) explain the situation more from a prism of fairness, viewing the sanctioning of meat consumption as a fitting gesture. Originally, man and animals -- both

created by the Hand of Hashem -- were (in some sense) on equal ground; what right did one group have to take their sustenance from the other? This all changed with the advent of the Flood, however, wherein all of the world's inhabitants were slated for extermination. They actually would have vanished for good, if not for one man -- Noach -- in whose merit and due to whose efforts all life was preserved. The animals whose lives had been forfeit now owed their very existence to this man. As such, Noach and his progeny were sanctioned to eat meat, an appropriate recompense for his labors (cf. *Mizrachi*, *Chizkuni*. Along similar lines, the *Rivash* adds that because he saved them from extinction, Noach in effect "acquired" the animals and now "owned" them, to do with as he pleased. Additionally, the Ohr Hachaim sees in this situation a fulfillment of the verse in Tehillim [128:2]: "The toil of your hands... you shall consume").

The issue can also be approached from the standpoint of retribution. Consider the following Mishnah (*Sotah* 2:1), which describes the obligatory meal-offering brought by a *sotah* (suspected adulteress):

כָּל הַמִּנְחוֹת בָּאוֹת מִן הַחֲטִיף, וְזוֹ בָּצָה מִן הַשְּׁעוֹרִים... רָבִן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, כֶּשֶׁם שֶׁמַּעֲשִׂיהָ מַעֲשֶׂה בְהֵמָה, כֵּן קָרְבָּנָהּ מֵאֵכֶל בְּהֵמָה.

"Conventional meal-offerings are composed of wheat (which is the standard fare for people), while the *sotah*'s offering was comprised of barley (animal food [*Rashi to Sotah 10a*]). Rabban Gamaliel explains (the reason for the unique ingredient of the *sotah*'s meal-offering): Just as her actions resembled those of an animal (through her unhampered and indiscriminate

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behavior), so too, her offering is brought from animal fare.”

The Mishnah teaches us that those who -- through their base actions -- reduce themselves to the level of an animal are viewed and treated as such by the Torah. The most appropriate fare for such individuals is that which is fit for an animal. The *Tzror Hamor* explains the difference between Adam and Noach along similar lines. In some fashion, Adam -- by violating Hashem's command to refrain from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge -- resembled the animals, who likewise live unrestricted lives. As such, he was granted permission to eat only vegetation, in the same manner as his animal “colleagues.” With Noach, on the other hand, it was a much different story. The prevailing culture of decadence was marked by an over-indulgence in one's animalistic desires. In contrast, Noach and his family restrained themselves and retained their spiritual dignity and stature. As such, they were accorded a form of sustenance that befit their superior status and differentiated them from the animal class.

### DEMOTION

Until now, we have focused primarily on the difference between Adam and Noach. It could be, however, that the change in food options between the pre- and post-Flood periods is more closely linked to a change in the animals themselves. While not knowing (or caring) how the following explanation may square with current scientific theory, we present here a synopsis of the enlightening comments of the great sage R' Yehonoson Eibschitz (with minimal editorial material added peripherally).

The vegetarian community is wont to lobby for their position that killing animals for food is wrong with the claim that “animals also have feelings.” In actuality, there may be some truth to this statement -- or at least there was, before the Flood. Animals in general possessed a somewhat different bearing then, as they were actually more intelligent in that era. The verse

tells us, “And the snake was more clever than all of the other animals of the field” (*Bereishis 3:1*), a fairly clear indication that the other animals were also in possession of some intelligence (but their IQ just did not match up to that of the serpent). As creatures of *sechel* (“brains,” in the colloquial sense), it was not appropriate to kill them and use them for food.

All of this changed with the advent of the Flood. Included in the lasting deleterious effects of this global upheaval was the downgrade of animal intelligence, as the animals lost the ability to think, know and be cognizant of the import of occurrences. As such, the Torah sanctioned using animals for food. With no offense intended against these otherwise loveable creatures, nowadays animals don't know enough to be truly bothered about the prospect of becoming someone's dinner (*Tiferes Yehonoson 8:21*).

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