

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Hilda bas Tzvi Hyman a”h
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Dawn of Time: What Was on the Menu?

Adam Harishon – Vegetarian?

These days when dieting is all the rage, some may want to point to Adam Harishon as the pioneer of vegetarians. Such a notion does seem to be supported by the plain reading of the section in this week’s *parshah* in which Adam is informed of his fare; as the verse states (*Bereishis 1:29-30*): “Behold, I have given you all herbaceous growth... on the face of the earth, and... fruit of the tree... they shall be to you for consumption. And to all animals of the earth, and all birds of the heavens, and all that crawls on the land... all vegetation (has been designated) for consumption.” The picture certainly appears to be one of a world wherein all creatures – from the lowliest worm to human beings – share a vegetarian lifestyle.

A closer look reveals that the matter may not be so simple. Consider the prohibition of *eiver min hachai*, which forbids the consumption of a limb separated from a live animal. *Eiver min hachai* is included in the list of the seven pre-Sinaitic laws, which the Gemara (*Sanhedrin 56b*) derives from a command Hashem issues to Adam in this week’s *parshah* (*Bereishis 2:16*). Now, if Adam was already proscribed from all manner of meat-consumption, what need was there for a further directive singling out *eiver min hachai*? The obvious implication seems to be that regular meat-consumption was, indeed, an option for Adam Harishon (*cf. Tosafos, ibid., s.v. Achol*).

Perhaps even more blatant is Chazal’s depiction of the idyllic life afforded to Adam in Gan Eden (*Avos D’Rebbi Nassan 1:8*). They describe him reclining in the Garden, waited upon by angelic attendants who would roast meat for him and prepare his wine. (This situation continued until it was noticed by a snake with a propensity to envy. From that point on matters proceeded steadily downhill.) In any event, the description hardly fits one of a purely vegetarian lifestyle. And so we are saddled with an apparent incongruity: was Adam a vegetarian, or wasn’t he?

Different Types, Different Times, Different Methods

On this issue, various sages of the Tosafist school advance differing approaches. The *Chizkuni* (*Bereishis 1:29*) implies that Adam’s menu was, indeed, restricted to vegetarian dishes. The meat prepared for him by the angels was of a different sort altogether, as it descended from Heaven (*cf. Sanhedrin 59b*). As such, this meal did not have actual “meat” status – insofar as the general ban on eating flesh was concerned (one could contemplate whether it could be cooked in a *milchige* pot, eaten during the Nine Days, etc.).

The *Tosafos al Hatorah* take a different tack. While seeming to confer “*fleishige*” status on all types of meat (regardless of origin), a distinction is drawn between varying periods of time. They contend that while Adam was proscribed from eating all manner of meat, this ban was instituted only *after* the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. As long as he still resided in Gan Eden, meat dishes were permissible, and so Adam could partake there of the angels’ offerings.

A final approach is offered by *Tosafos* to *Sanhedrin (56b)*. They differentiate not in origin or time-periods, but in the method of procurement. According to this view, the ban applies only to

the killing of animals for their meat; but the flesh of animals that died on their own (or prepared by celestial chefs) was permissible to Adam. This accounts for the specific directive prohibiting *eiver min hachai*: since regular meat (of an expired animal) was permissible, one would assume that the same would be true of a limb that fell (on its own) from a live animal. It was such an entity that the Torah sought to restrict.

To sum up, then, it appears that we have three views as to Adam's status as a vegetarian: According to the *Chizkuni*, it seems that Adam could only eat foods of non-meat status; the *Tosafos al Hatorah* contend that Adam became a vegetarian only after the sin of Gan Eden; and according to *Tosafos* in Sanhedrin, Adam was a full-fledged meat eater, restricted only from killing for his food.

Strange Bedfellows

A final point relevant to the topic is the implication of the blessing Hashem conferred upon Adam. In the verse immediately preceding the ones discussed above, Hashem declares (v. 28): "And you shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and all of the animals..." What manner of dominance would man exert over the animals? It could very well take the form of labor, as he impresses the ox and the horse into agricultural service. However, what productive farm work or transportation could be provided by *fish*? The verse seems to be stating that for Adam Harishon, there is a permissible form of trapping animals for food – namely, fishing! This seems to lend some support to the notion that Adam was, in fact, a flesh-eater.

The Gemara itself (*Sanhedrin 59b*) clarifies the issue, explaining that the intent of the verse – even with regard to fish – is for labor and not as a food source. How could this be possible? The Gemara illustrates based on the law prohibiting the enlistment of two different types of animals in work, as the verse states: "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together" (*Devarim 22:10*). Although the *passuk* mentions ox and donkey, the prohibition actually applies to any two (different) animals paired together, a fact reflected in the following Mishnah (*Kilayim 8:2*):

בְּהֵמָה עִם בְּהֵמָה וְחַיָּה עִם חַיָּה, בְּהֵמָה עִם חַיָּה... אֲסוּרִין לְחַרֵּשׁ וְלִמְשֹׁךְ וְלִהְנוֹהֵג.

"Of the following combinations – any domesticated animal with another (type of) domesticated animal; any wild animal with another (type of) wild animal; a domesticated animal with a wild animal... – one is forbidden to employ them in plowing, pulling or leading."

In any event, the aforementioned Gemara cites the sage Rachvah, who posed quite an interesting query on this issue. Rachvah wondered if the prohibition would apply when one hitches up his wagon in the following way: part of the reins are attached to a goat who travels on land, while the other section is strapped to a fish who pulls it in the water. Regardless of the conclusion reached in Rachvah's question, we do see a manifestation of the harnessing of "fish-power" for productive use. As such, the exhortation to Adam to dominate the fish of the sea can be understood in the sense of subjugation to labor. Thus, the prohibition to kill for flesh remained intact. (It was not lifted until after the flood, as elaborated on in *Mishnas Chayim, parshas No'ach*, 5772).