

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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פרשת ראה  
כ"ז במנחם אב תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 11:26-16:17

In this *parasha*, Moshe instructs the *Bnei Yisrael* (the Israelites) regarding idolatry, false prophets, pure and impure foods, tithes, freeing slaves, and pilgrimage festivals.

Chapter 12, verses 20-22 address the question of the permissibility of eating meat:

כ כִּי-יִרְחִיב ה' אֶת-לְהִידָךְ אֶת-גְּבֻלְךָ, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר-לְךָ, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכַלְהָ בָשָׂר, כִּי-תֵאָוֶה נַפְשְׁךָ לֶאֱכֹל בָּשָׂר--בְּכָל-אֲוֹת נַפְשְׁךָ, תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר. כא כִּי-יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֶת-לְהִידָךְ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם, וְזָבַחְתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לְךָ, כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶךָ--וְאָכַלְתָּ, בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ, בְּכָל, אֲוֹת נַפְשְׁךָ. כב אֲדָּ, כַּאֲשֶׁר יֹאכַל אֶת-הַצִּבִּי וְאֶת-הָאֵיל--כֵּן, תֹאכְלֶנּוּ: הַטָּמֵא, וְהַטָּהוֹר, יִחְדּוּ, יֹאכְלֶנּוּ.

20 When Hashem your God shall enlarge your border, as Hashem promised you, and you shall say: I will eat meat, because your soul desires to eat meat; you may eat meat, after all the desire of your soul. 21 If the place which Hashem your God shall choose to put [the Divine] Name there is too far from you, then you shall kill of your herd and of your flock, which Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you, and you shall eat within your gates, after all the desire of your soul. 22 Even as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you shall eat them; the ritually impure and the ritually pure shall eat of them alike.

Clearly, eating meat is permitted by the Torah. However, there was one major early modern rabbinic figure who was theoretically opposed to meat-eating. Rav Kook (1865-1935) was the first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel and a highly respected and

beloved Jewish spiritual leader in the early 20th century. He was a mystical thinker, a forceful writer, and a great Torah scholar.

In *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*, Rav Kook states that the permission to eat meat was only a temporary concession; he maintains that a God who is merciful to creatures would not institute an everlasting law permitting the killing of animals for food. He states, "It is inconceivable that the Creator who had planned a world of harmony and a perfect way for the human to live should, many thousands of years later, find that this plan was wrong."

According to Rav Kook, because people had sunk to an extremely low level of spirituality in the time of Noach (see *Bereshit* [Genesis] 9:3-4), it was necessary that they be given an elevated image of themselves as compared to animals, and that they concentrate their efforts into first improving relationships between people. Hashem felt that if people were denied permission to eat meat, they might eat the flesh of human beings due to their inability to control their lust for flesh, and Hashem thus regarded permission to slaughter animals for food as a "transitional tax" or temporary dispensation until a "brighter era" (the Messianic age) is reached, at which point people would return to vegetarian diets. It is purported that Rav Kook did eat chicken on Shabbat, perhaps to reinforce the idea that the ideal vegetarian time had not yet arrived, or perhaps because he too had a desire for meat.

Rav Kook believed that the permission to eat meat "after all the desire of your soul" is a concealed reproach and a qualified command. He stated that a day will come when people will detest the eating of the flesh of animals because of a moral loathing, and then it shall be said that "because your soul does not long to eat meat, you will not eat meat." Along with permission to eat meat, Judaism provides many laws and restrictions about what kind of meat someone may eat and how it must be prepared for consumption. Rav Kook believed that there is an implied reprimand in these regulations which create an elaborate apparatus designed to keep alive a sense of reverence for life, with the aim of eventually leading people away from their meat-eating habit.

According to Rav Kook, all of these laws and restrictions serve to raise the consciousness of Jews, to get them to think about what they are eating, and to decide if the fare meets religious requirements. The eating of meat is thus not taken for granted, and this mandated consideration of what is on the plate can be a first step toward rejecting meat consumption.

Rav Kook believed that the high moral level represented by the vegetarianism of the generations before Noach is a virtue of such great value that it cannot be lost forever. In the future ideal state, just as at the initial period, people and animals will not eat flesh. No one will hurt or destroy another living creature. People's lives will no longer be supported at the expense of the lives of animals.

However, in that same treatise, Rav Kook has sharp words for people who promote vegetarianism these days in our imperfect world. Such an ideology is clearly a sign of pretentiousness, he says. Rav Kook sarcastically writes that the vegetarian today "has already made everything better in this world, has already removed the kingdom of wickedness and of lies, national hatred, racial prejudice... It is as if all these no longer exist in the world," and all that remains to be fixed is the relationship of human beings and animals. Further, a vegetarian should not morally lord it over a non-vegetarian as eating meat was permitted by God in the Torah.

Non-meat-eaters and meat-eaters alike cite Rav Kook in support of their positions. Whatever one's position on being a carnivore, it is clear that the Torah certainly allows for meat consumption.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Why do you think that Rav Kook believes that it is higher moral state not to eat meat even though it is permitted by the Torah?
- Do you think the eating of meat, of poultry, and of fish are morally equivalent? Why or why not?
- Do you think milk and eggs should be included in Rav Kook's statements? Why or why not?