

Is God an Angry Vegan?

February 4, 2020 • Rabbi Jesse Paikin • rabbijesse@sixthandi.org

The Original Diet: *Bereshit*

Genesis: 1:28-30

28. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

29. God said, “Look, I give you all the seed-bearing plants upon all the face of the earth, and every tree that has in it seed-bearing fruit; these shall be yours to eat.

30. And to every land animal, to every bird of the sky, and to all that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, I [give] all the green vegetation for food.” And so it was.

28. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדִגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: 29. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זָרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִי-עֵץ זָרַע זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: 30. וְלִכָּל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכָּל רוֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן:

The New Diet: *Noah*

Genesis 9:1-4

1. God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

2. Let the awe and dread of you be upon all the land animals, and all the birds of the sky, and all the living things on the earth, and the fish of the sea: they are given into your hands.

3. Any small animal that is alive shall be yours to eat; like green grasses, I give you [them] all.

4. But flesh whose lifeblood is [still] in it you may not eat.”

1. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת-בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ: 2. וּמִוֹרָאֲכֶם וּחִתְכֶם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמָשׁ הָאֲדָמָה וּבְכָל-דְּגַי הַיָּם בְּיַדְכֶם נִתְּנוּ: 3. כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר-הוּא-חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ כִּי־רַק לֹשֶׁב נֹתְתִי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל: 4. אֲדָם-בָּשָׂר בְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ:

1. Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Spain, 1194-1270)

The original prohibition to kill animals to eat their meat is because they have a bit of stature to their souls: they resemble "*intelligent souls*" and seek their own benefit and food, and run away from pain and death...

2. Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel (Portugal, 1437-1508)

The people after the flood were afraid, and said: "What will we eat, since we have neither the fruits of the tree that were given to Adam to eat nor vegetables to eat?! If we wait until we plant all kinds of plants and trees in the earth in order to eat of their fruit, it will be many days and months – perhaps a year – before there is fruit!

And in the meantime, what will we eat? We will die of hunger and be like dung on the face of the earth. It would have been better to die in the flood than die by famine!"

Therefore, God said, "Anything living that walks is for you to eat" – because meat stands for you in the place of the green grass I gave to your ancestors.

3. Rabbi Isaiah Horovitz (Prague, c. 1565-1630)

Because Noah had commenced the process of repairing the damage to the production of food caused by Adam, he was given the right to improve his diet and that of mankind after him.

4. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*, Leon R. Kass (b. 1939, USA)

As in Eden, there is one minor restriction: no living flesh or blood. But the original or hoped-for harmonious relation of man and animals... in which man, like a true ruler, rules in the interest of the ruled, is gone forever; the shepherd will now tend his flock with at least part of his mind on lamb chops. Yet the shepherd is not – and must not become – a wolf. He can and must abide by the restriction on eating "flesh with the life thereof."

5. *From Adam to Noach*, Moshe David Cassuto (Italy, 1883-1951)

When Noah and his descendants were permitted to eat meat this was a concession conditional on the prohibition of the blood. This prohibition implied respect for the principle of life ("for the blood is the life") and an allusion to the fact that in reality all meat should have been prohibited. The partial prohibition was designed to call to mind the previously total one.

6. Deuteronomy 12:20-21

When the Eternal enlarges your territory, as promised, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you desire to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.

If the place where the Eternal has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of your cattle or your sheep that the Eternal has given you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart’s content in your settlements.

פִּי־רָחִיב יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֶת־גְּבוּלֶךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר־לְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכַלְהָ בָשָׂר כִּי־תִאָּוֶה נַפְשְׁךָ לֶאֱכֹל בָּשָׂר בְּכָל־אֲוֹת נַפְשְׁךָ תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר:

כִּי־יִרְסַק מִמֶּךָ מִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יְבַסֵּר יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׂמוֹ שֵׁם וְנִבְחַתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ בְּכָל־אֲוֹת נַפְשְׁךָ:

7. Sifre Devarim 75 (Midrash on Deuteronomy)

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah says: The Torah is teaching proper behavior that a person should only eat meat out of a craving. Can one take meat from the market and eat it? The Torah teaches: “You shall slaughter from *your* cows and *your* sheep” (Deut. 12:20). A person may only eat meat if he has cows and sheep.

8. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935)

Why mention the desire to eat meat? The Torah is hinting: if you are unable to naturally overcome your desire to eat meat, and the time for moral interdiction has not yet arrived – i.e. you still grapple with not harming those even closer to you (fellow human beings) – then you may slaughter and eat animals.

9. Rabbi Yosef Karo, *Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 7:1* (1563, Tzfat)

A person may affix a knife to a wheel of stone or of wood, and then spin the wheel with their hand or their foot, and place there the throat of a beast or a fowl until it is slaughtered by the spinning of the wheel. And if water spins the wheel, and they place the throat against [the wheel] at the moment in which it spun, and the animal was slaughtered, this is not kosher. And if a person released water that flowed and spun a wheel, and the knife slaughtered with the spinning, this is considered kosher, but only after the fact, since this came from the force of a person. These things are only said about the first spin, which contains human force. But on the second spin or any after it, the animal is not kosher, since it wasn't slaughtered from human force but rather the force of water flowing.

10. Rabbi Israel Isserlein (1390-1460, Austria)

Is plucking feathers from live geese similar to shearing sheep or is it inflicting suffering on animals?

Just like cutting the tongue from a bird so that it will talk or the ears and tail from a dog to prettify it, it appears that there is no prohibition due to (the prohibition of) inflicting suffering on animals, if he does it for his needs and use. For “animals were created only to serve human beings,” as it says in (the Talmud) Kiddushin 82a...

...now it is decided that the harming of animals is forbidden because of the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals... From these proofs, it is somewhat clear that the prohibition of inflicting suffering on animals does not apply, except that Jews are wary and refrain (from doing so). It is possible that the reason is that they do not want to be cruel to creatures...

11. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, commenting on *Shulkhan Arukh, Even HaEzer 5:14*

Anything that is necessary for medicine or anything else does not fall under the jurisdiction of [the prohibition of inflicting] suffering on animals and, therefore, it is permitted to pluck feathers from live geese and disregard [the prohibition of inflicting] suffering on animals. However, everyone refrains from doing so because it would be cruelty.